STUDIA ETHNOLOGICA UPSALIENSIA 4

JÓN HNEFILL AÐALSTEINSSON

Under the Cloak

The Acceptance of Christianity in Iceland with Particular Reference to the Religious Attitudes Prevailing at the Time

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The final chapter contains an attempt to explain the apparent paradox that a devout pagan majority should come to abide by Þorgier's verdict and be converted. In this connection examples of pagan reaction on similar occasions elsewhere in Europe are studied. It appears that the oracle was a venerated practice everywhere. Consequently the author concludes that the oracle, which in all probability Þorgeir sought under his cloak, gave him the jurisdiction that made his pagan contemporaries abide by his decision.

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Preface

The first part of this work is largely based on my licentiate thesis *Islands kristnande* which I wrote at the University of Uppsala 1964–6 under the supervision of Professor Dag Strömbäck. The following years I continued research into the subject in Reykjavík under the supervision of Professor Magnús Már Lárusson resulting in 1971 in the work, *Kristinitakan á Íslandi.*[1] A translation of this into English took some time but in the spring of 1975 I presented this at two seminars under the auspices of Professor Anna Birgitta Rooth at the University of Uppsala. My interlocutors in addition to Professor Rooth were Professor Peter Foote and Lektor Heimir Pálsson. I have since completely revised the work on the basis of the useful criticism received at these seminars and of the publications that have appeared since the first version was written.

The initial English translation was made by Barry J. Duesbury, B.A. and Jón Hannesson, formerly visiting lecturer at the Interpreters' Institute in Leipzig. The latter also translated the revised version. Old Icelandic texts are quoted here from the Icelandic series *Íslenzk fornrit* while other texts have generally been normalised to match the conventions of that series. Some inconsistency remains but should not be detrimental.

I am indebted to many people for the successful completion of this work but I shall mention only a few. I have benefited a great deal from Professor Dag Strömbäck who is one of the foremost experts in this particular field and I am grateful to him for his sure and friendly guidance. I also want to thank Dr Bo Almqvist and Professor Magnús Már Lárusson for much useful advice and encouragement.

Professor Anna Birgitta Rooth has proved a sound and realistic critic and her suggestions and proposals have been most beneficial. Her solid scientific attitude is largely responsible for what may be found valuable in this work. I am also deeply grateful to her for making the presentation of this thesis possible.

Professor Peter Foote's scholarly criticism has been invaluable in connection with the revised version of this work. He has also offered various useful suggestions on style and language.

Dr Sveinbjörn Rafnsson read through the first two chapters and made many valuable suggestions. I also wish to acknowledge the assistance given

[1] Aðalsteinsson 1971. See reviews by Gíslason in *Saga* 1972 and by Fries in *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 5 1972.

by Heimir Pálsson and Teitur Benediktsson in connection with qoutations. The translators I wish to thank for their arduous work and the publisher for his cooperation and generous attention to the work.

Last but not least my family deserve my gratitude for their manifold assistance and for their patience while I was absorbed in my work. My wife, Svava Jakobsdóttir, A.B., has assisted me with translations of corrections in the last version of the English text, while our son, Jakob S., read through most of the thesis with me.

Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson

Introduction

Much has been written about the acceptance of Christianity in Iceland. The works of Konrad Maurer from the middle of the 19th century and Björn M. Ólsen from the turn of the century[1] formed the basis for the work of scholars right up to the present.[2] In the last few years fresh light has been shed upon the subject. Writing in 1974 about the lampooning of the missionaries Bo Almqvist advances a new hypothesis to explain events leading to the Conversion of the country.[3] In 1975 Dag Strömbäck published his work, The Conversion of Iceland, in which he makes a thorough study of the legal, political and religious aspects of the Conversion.[4] This work turns over a new leaf in the research into the Conversion, especially with respect to the evaluation of the sources, which for the first time are subjected to a strictly scientific analysis.[5]

Scholars agree that the acceptance of Christianity in Iceland took place in the last year of the reign of King Óláfr Tryggvason, that is, 999 or 1000,[6] but opinions differ about the factors which caused the pagans to consent so immediately to the introduction of Christianity. The previous years had seen a bitter struggle between pagans and Christians.

In this work I attempt to explain the course of events leading to the country's Conversion through consideration of the religious issues. First I try to shed light upon the state of religion in Iceland prior to its Conversion. The available sources are studied and evaluated and an attempt is made to assess how far they can be relied upon. Accounts of the religion of the settlers in Iceland are studied and an assessment made of what religion the great majority of the settlers adhered to.

The following chapter deals with what is known about the worship of separate pagan gods in Iceland and the question whether temples were erected there. Another chapter deals with fatalism and its place in the ideas and beliefs of pagan Scandinavians as far as this is possible.

The sources on the Conversion of Iceland are thoroughly analysed from historical and literary point of view, both *Íslendingabók* by Ari the Wise

[1] Maurer I–II 1855–6. Ólsen 1900.
[2] Jóhannesson 1956, 151–66. Lindal 1974, 227–288 and references.
[3] Almqvist 1974, 15–25. See further review by Aðalsteinsson in Skirnir 1977, 196–9.
[4] Strömbäck 1975. See further review by Aðalsteinsson in Skirnir 1976, 268–71.
[5] Strömbäck 1975, 17 ff.
[6] Einarsdóttir 1964, 118 ff. See further Foote in Strömbäck 1975, 2 note 1 and references.

and other younger sources. There follows a long chapter on the missionary activity, where an attempt is made to assess the historicity of the sources on the missionaries, and finally I endeavour to estimate the proportional strength of paganism and Christianity towards the end of the missions.

The course of events at the general assembly leading to the Conversion is traced on the authority of *Íslendingabók*. Those factors in Ari's account which require elucidation receive particular attention. Manifold comparison is used to shed light upon various aspects of Ari's account which have not been fully explained so far by scholars. To do so I draw upon parallels from the entire area of Nordic culture. I also attempt to explain the actions of the most influential individuals as far as the sources allow.

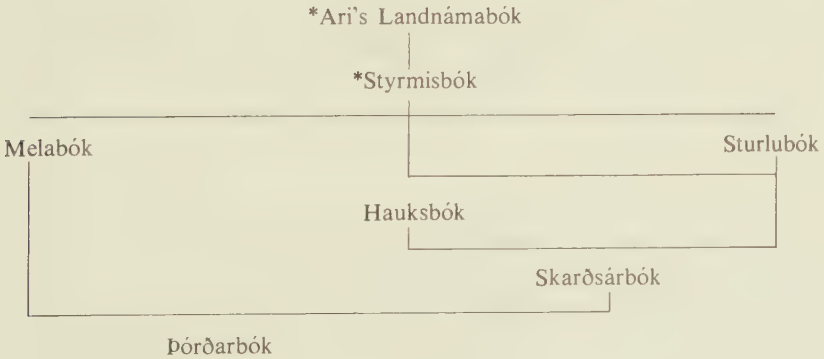
On the basis of this comparison I advance a new explanation of the paramount reason why Iceland was converted to Christianity with no more shedding of blood than was the case.

I. Sources on Icelandic paganism

1. Landnámabók

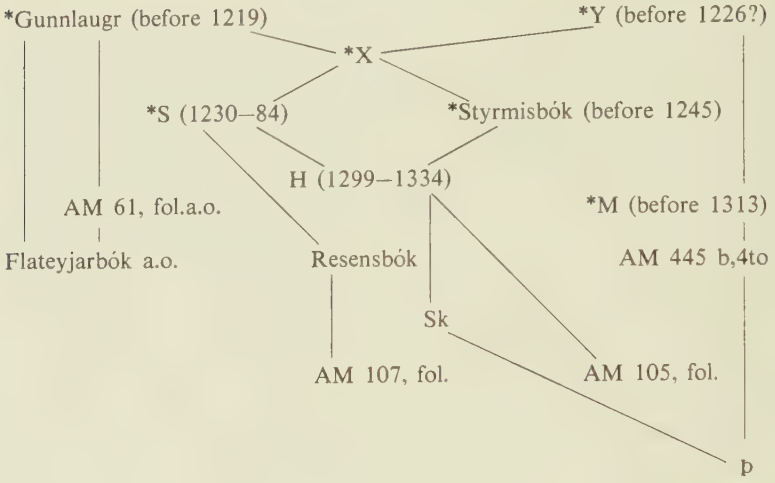
The original version of *Landnámabók* is thought to have been written towards the end of the 11th or at the beginning of the 12th century.[1] There is evidence that a part of this version, which Icelandic scholars have termed *Frum-Landnáma* (The First *Landnáma*), was dictated by Kolskeggr the Wise.[2] Some scholars, too, are of the opinion that Ari the Wise was involved in the writing of this version.[3] Not a trace has been found of this version but over a century later Styrmir Kárason the Wise wrote another *Landnáma* version, which has been termed **Styrmisbók*. This is also lost. The versions of *Landnámabók* which have been preserved in parts at least are: *Sturlubók* (S), written by Sturla Þórðarson, who was Lawspeaker (*lǫgsǫgumaðr*) in the years 1263–72. This version has been preserved substantially. *Melabók* (M), written towards the end of the 13th or early in the 14th century, preserved only as a fragment. *Hauksbók* (H), written in the first decade of the 14th century by Haukr Erlendsson, Law-man (*lǫgmaðr*). *Skarðsárbók* and *Þórðarbók* from the first half of the 17th century.[4]

In his book, *Gerðir Landnámabókar* (The Versions of *Landnámabók*), Jón Jóhannesson discussed the connection between the various versions of *Landnámabók*. He presented his conclusions by means of the diagram in Fig. 1.[5]



[1] Jóhannesson 1941, 221. Benediktsson in ÍF I, CXVII. Rafnsson 1974, 113.
[2] ÍF I, 302.
[3] Benediktsson in ÍF I, CXVII. Jóhannesson 1941, 220 f. Helgason 1963, XI f.
[4] Jóhannesson 1941, 22 ff. Benediktsson in ÍF I, L ff. Rafnsson 1974, 13 ff.
[5] Jóhannesson 1941, 226.

Many scholars have accepted these conclusions.[6] In *Studier i Landnámabók*, Sveinbjörn Rafnsson has, however, arrived at a somewhat different conclusion as to the connection between the *Landnáma* versions and other relevant works. Rafnsson's diagram is essentially shown in Fig. 2.[7]



Rafnsson's main conclusions, other than those directly revealed by his diagram, are that S and H are coloured by the concerns of the ecclesiast and historian. This is evidenced e.g. by the great space allotted to Christian settlers in these versions of *Landnámabók* as well as by the fact that from the beginning a special Christian History (*Kristni saga*) formed a sequel to it.[8] Rafnsson is of the opinion that in this matter S and H are influenced by Gunnlaugr Leifsson and partly by Styrmir Kárason the Wise, while M is unaffected by such ecclesiastic and historical considerations. Rafnsson traces these influences to the early 13th century and concludes that in all probability M therefore best preserves the original version of *Landnámabók*.[9]

[6] Benediktsson in ÍF I, L. Helgason 1963, IX. Yet Sveinsson 1965, 101 ff. considers *Melabók* based on an older version of *Landnámabók* than *Styrmisbók*.

[7] Rafnsson 1974, 81. Gunnlaugr is a lost work on Óláfr Tryggvason written by Gunnlaugr Leifsson, a monk in the Þingeyri monastery. (See Aðalbjarnarson 1937, 91 ff.) AM 61 fol. is the main manuscript of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (see Ch. V.5 below). AM 445 is a fragment of the M manuscript. AM 105 is a copy of H. AM 107 is a copy of S made after *Resensbók*, an old vellum manuscript of S (see Jóhannesson 1941, 18 f. and Rafnsson 1974, 19; 22 ff.). *Flateyjarbók* was written about 1390 and contains many sagas, especially Sagas about Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr the Saint. Sk is *Skarðsárbók* and Þ is *Þórðarbók*.

[8] Rafnsson 1974, 82 f.

[9] Rafnsson 1974, 83.

Scholars differ as to why *Landnámabók* was written. Barði Guðmundsson considered the motivation to be constitutional amendments introducing allodial rights.[10] Jón Jóhannesson rejected this and thought it: "Most probable that the authors of *Frum-Landnáma* were only moved by historical interest".[11] Jakob Benediktsson maintains that there is no reason to reject Guðmundsson's theory as categorically as Jóhannesson did. Benediktsson insists that there is no conclusive evidence and all suggestions as to the motivation of the original authors of *Landnámabók* must remain hypothetical.[12] Sveinbjörn Rafnsson has reopened the debate by his conclusion—based on research into the background of *Landnámabók*—that it is a written source on the rights of the landowning families in Iceland.[13]

This controversy is partly outside the scope of this work. What matters to us is whether reference to beliefs and religious observance of individual settlers were part of the original version or whether they are later additions adopted from the Sagas or other written sources or even from oral tradition. If historical veracity were the motivation of the early *Landnámabók* writers one might assume that they would have been anxious to include everything that was known to them of the various settlers, separate accounts of their sacrifices and faith in addition to information on their family and settlement. The theory of historical motivation has now been descredited. Jakob Benediktsson has pointed out the flaws in this supposition[14] and Sveinbjörn Rafnsson has put forward a more plausible hypothesis.[15] But even a theory like Sveinbjörn's could reasonably assume the compilers would be interested in the way in which tithe to land was first established—and here an interest in heathen ceremony and custom was unavoidable. The question then remains whether the accounts of the faith of individual settlers nevertheless belong to the original version of *Landnámabók* or whether they were added later. Our answer is that no definite rule can be applied. Occasionally it can be shown (Ch. II.2 below) that an account dates back to the original version but most often each account can, strictly speaking, be credited with no greater antiquity than the source preserving it.

2. Íslendingasögur

The Icelandic Sagas, most of which were written in the 13th century, vary in age and reliability, but the majority of them treat material which was already 250–300 years old when they were written. Their source-value as

[10] Guðmundsson 1959, 76 ff.; 90.
[11] Jóhannesson 1941, 220.
[12] Benediktsson in ÍF I, CXVIII and references.
[13] Rafnsson 1974, 142.
[14] Benediktsson in ÍF I, CXVIII.
[15] Rafnsson 1974, 133–165.

regards paganism in Iceland is therefore limited. It is also evident that the authors know much less about paganism than they did about the superstition of their contemporaries, as has been shown by Dag Strömbäck.[16] It may also be difficult to judge to what extent these anonymous authors based their material on Icelandic oral traditions and how much they gleaned from contemporary literature. Sometimes they seem to follow the formula that James Carney applies to old-Irish literature, i.e. the kernel is based on oral tradition while the frame is derived from the author's knowledge of literature.[17] It has been pointed out that the authors of the Icelandic Sagas were not tied down in the collection of material and the treatment of their subject and that in many instances artistic consideration is of greater concern to them than historical authenticity.[18] But we must be careful not to generalize. Some of them, e.g. the author of *Eyrbyggja saga* (see Ch. II.1), seem to have been particularly interested in ancient native matters and many Sagas contain old verses and poems which support the story.[19] Scholars have differed on the source-value of the Sagas as far as religion is concerned[20] but my view is that to distinguish between tradition and invention every Saga must be subjected to linguistic, folkloristic and historical examination.[21] Until such an examination has been made, no individual saga motive can be considered a valid source for religious history, nor must it altogether be rejected as not being one. This reservation must be borne in mind in the following discussion of evidence from *Íslendingasögur*, and I shall also discuss briefly the history of each text adduced.

3. The old poetry

Poems and verses of the skalds are not always as clear as one would desire and there is often disagreement about their meaning and authenticity.[22] In many cases it is obvious that a certain poem or verse is from the heathen period and then it attains particular value as a contemporary source.[23] The mythological poems of the Edda are mostly from the heathen period.[24]

[16] Strömbäck 1935, 2 f.
[17] Carney 1955, 321 f.
[18] Nordal 1940, 68. Strömbäck 1964, 21 f. The same author 1975, 9 ff. Sveinsson 1965, 143 ff. Lárusson 1967, 1 f.
[19] Nordal 1953, 230 ff. Sveinsson in KL VII 1962, 496–513.
[20] Sveinsson in KL VII 1962, 496 ff. and references. See further Olsen 1966, 19 ff. and Liestøl 1938, 169 ff.
[21] See further Strömbäck 1943, 53.
[22] Helgason 1953, 143 ff.
[23] Helgason 1953, 151 f. Strömbäck 1975, 68 ff.
[24] Nordal 1942, 237 ff. The same author 1952, 15 ff. Helgason 1953, 31 ff.

4. Names and archeological sources

Topographical names are also important sources for details of heathen belief, as indeed are personal names as well.[25] Archeological remains also throw considerable light upon the religion of the early inhabitants of Iceland, but a great deal remains to be done in archeological research in Iceland.[26]

Résumé

The chief sources on the heathen religion of the Icelandic settlers are *Landnámabók, Íslendingasögur*, the old poetry, names and archeological sources. A part of the old poetry is from pagan times but very little verse can date back to the time of settlement, so that the archeological remains are the only contemporary source of information about the faith of the settlers. *Landnámabók* is originally from the late 11th or early 12th century but it has been preserved in versions from the 13th and 14th centuries. According to some of the leading scholars (Rafnsson 1974) a tendency to exaggerate the role of Christianity can be observed in the S and H versions of *Landnámabók* but least in M. The *Íslendingasögur* are at best of limited value as sources of information on paganism.

[25] Professor Þórhallur Vilmundarson has in several lectures discussed the meaning of old Icelandic names. His main conclusion is that the name-giving is to a great extent based on natural facts, landscape etc. On these grounds he has questioned the authenticity of many old names generally believed to be rooted in the old Norse mythology. See further Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1969, 431–456 and 1975, 288–301. Þórhallur has been countered by Svavar Sigmundsson 1975, 245–50.

[26] Eldjárn 1956, 426 ff.

II. The religious activity of the settlers as expressed in the stories

1. Sacrifices in Norway

The first settler in Iceland, Ingólfr, prepared for his journey to claim land in this way, according to both S and H versions of *Landnámabók*:

Þenna vetr fekk Ingólfr at blóti miklu ok leitaði sér heilla um forlǫg sín, en Hjǫrleifr vildi aldri blóta. Fréttin vísaði Ingólfi til Íslands.[1] (That winter Ingólfr prepared a great sacrifice and sought omens for his destiny, but Hjǫrleifr would never sacrifice. The answer directed Ingólfr to Iceland.)

Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi took measures similar to that of Ingólfr before he left Norway according to *Eyrbyggja saga:*

Þórólfr Mostrarskegg fekk at blóti miklu ok gekk til fréttar við Þór, ástvin sinn, hvárt hann skyldi sættask við konung eða leita sér annarra forlaga, en fréttin vísaði Þórólfi til Íslands.[2] (Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi prepared a great sacrifice and enquired of Thór, his beloved friend, whether he should be reconciled with the king or leave the country to seek a new destiny for himself; and the answer directed Þórólfr to Iceland.)

Eyrbyggja saga is considered to have been written in the 13th century but scholars do not agree on how early. Sigurður Nordal opined that the story was written soon after 1250[3] and many scholars have accepted that opinion.[4] Einar Ól. Sveinsson on the other hand holds that the story was written about 1220.[5] It follows that opinion varies as to the relationship between *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Landnámabók*.[6] As a historical source about Old Nordic culture, *Eyrbyggja saga* has been considered of supreme importance among the *Íslendingasögur*.[7]

The accounts about Ingólfr and Þórólfr are similar, and it is not impossible that one was influenced by the other. The chapter on Ingólfr and Hjǫrleifr is missing in M but Rafnsson has argued that the original version

[1] ÍF I, 42. Hjǫrleifr will be mentioned later (see II.4).
[2] ÍF IV, 7.
[3] Nordal 1953, 248.
[4] Benediktsson in ÍF I, LXIV note 26 and references.
[5] Sveinsson in ÍF IV, LI. The same author 1965, 107 f.
[6] Sveinsson in ÍF IV, XLVI ff. The same author 1965, 105 ff. Benediktsson in ÍF I, LXIII f. notes 24, 26, 29 and references. Rafnsson 1974, 207 and note 17 and references.
[7] Sveinsson in ÍF IV, XXIII; XXVII ff. Strömbäck 1975, 41 ff. and note 3 and references. Sigfússon in KL IV 1959, 104.

of *Landnámabók* contained an account of them.[8] Of course it cannot be asserted that Ingólf's sacrifice was mentioned in that account, but if that was the case, we may assume that the author of *Eyrbyggja saga* used this source as a model even if Sveinsson's assumption were correct that *Eyrbyggja saga* was written about 1220. Our opinion is further strenghtened by the fact that the sentence, before the one describing the sacrifice of Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi in *Eyrbyggja saga*, states that Ingólfr had settled in Iceland 10 years earlier.[9] So the author of *Eyrbyggja saga* must have had in mind stories of Ingólfr in other works when he wrote his account of Þórólf's sacrifice.

A third account of the same nature, i.e. it is prophesied that a person will dwell in Iceland, is the story about the Finn-woman, versed in magic, who told Ingimundr the Old his destiny, though it was not sought by him, and directed him to Iceland. According to *Vatnsdœla saga* her prophecy came true though Ingimundr was most loth to leave Norway.[10]

2. A sacrifice in Iceland

Of some of the settlers it is specifically told that they were great heathen worshippers, greater believers than was common. Thus it is said in S and H of Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi: *Hann var blótmaðr mikill ok trúði á Þór.*[11] (He was a great heathen worshipper and put his faith in Thór.) Of another man it says in S and H: *Geirr hét maðr ágætr í Sogni; hann var kallaðr Végeirr, því at hann var blótmaðr mikill.*[12] (Geirr was the name of a man renowned in Sogn; he was called Végeirr because he was a great heathen worshipper.) The prefix *vé-* denotes sanctuary. The word exists in the scaldic poetry, especially as a part of the scaldic kennings and in the Eddaic poems about the abodes of the Nordic gods. *Vé* is related to the verb *vígja* (to consecrate), and it seems often to be applied to a consecrated place separated from the profane world around it.[13]

Vébjǫrn Sygnakappi, this Végeir's son, was at odds with Earl Hákon after the death of his father and therefore went with his brothers and sisters to Iceland. The account of their land-take is worthy of attention from the point of view of the history of religious belief. It is described thus in *Geirmundar þáttr* and *Landnámabók* (S and H):

[8] Rafnsson 1974, 162.
[9] ÍF IV, 7.
[10] ÍF VIII, 29. About the source-value of *Vatnsdœla saga* see Ch. IV, 1 below.
[11] ÍF I, 124. This account of Þórólfr is not in M.
[12] ÍF I, 188; 189.
[13] Olsen (Vi) in KL XIX 1975, 684 f. Turville-Petre 1964, 238 f.

Geirmundar þáttr	S	H
Þau velkti úti lengi um sumarit í hafinu, ok tóku at lyktum Hlǫðuvík um haustit fyrir vestan Horn. Þá gekk Vébjǫrn at blóta, en bræðr hans eggjuðu burtfarar, svá at hann gáði eigi blótsins, ok létu þau út ok brutu hinn sama dag undir hávum hǫmrum í miklu illviðri, ok kómuz þar upp, er nú heitir siðan Sygnakleif.*[14]	*Þau hǫfðu útivist harða ok langa. Þau tóku um haustit Hlǫðuvík fyrir vestan Horn; þá gekk Vébjǫrn at blóti miklu; hann kvað Hákon þann dag blóta þeim til óþurftar. En er hann var at blótinu, eggjuðu bræðr hans hann til brautfarar, ok gáði hann eigi blótsins, ok létu þeir út. Þeir brutu hinn sama dag skip sitt undir hǫmrum miklum í illviðri; þar kómuzk þau nauðulega upp, ok gekk Vébjǫrn fyrir; þat er nú kǫlluð Sygnakleif.*[15]	*Þau hǫfðu útivist harða ok langa. Þau tóku um haust Hlǫðuvík fyrir vestan Horn; þá fekk Vébjǫrn at blóti miklu ok kvað Hákon jarl blóta þann dag þeim til óþurftar. En er hann var at blótinu, eggjuðu bræðr hans hann til brottfarar ok gáðu þeir eigi blótsins, ok létu þeir út. Þeir brutu hinn sama dag skip sitt undir hǫmrum miklum í illviðri; þar kómusk þau nauðuliga upp ok gekk Vébjǫrn fyrir; þat er nú kǫlluð Sygnakleif.*[16]
** til blóts*		

(They had a long, hard voyage. In the autumn they reached Hlǫðuvík west of Horn; then Vébjǫrn made a great sacrifice and said that Earl Hákon was sacrificing that day to their damage. But while he was at the sacrifice his brothers urged that they go away, and he paid (H: they paid) no attention to the sacrifiece and they put to sea. That same day they wrecked their ship under great cliffs in bad weather; they got up there with the greatest difficulty and Vébjǫrn led the way; that place now has the name of Sygnakleif.)

Geirmundar þáttr is thought to have been written about 1300 in its present form at the beginning of *Sturlunga saga*.[17] Jóhannesson once compared *Geirmundar þáttr* and the *Landnámabók* versions and he concluded that the author of *Geirmundar þáttr* had based his account on an old *Landnámabók* version, very close to M. In accordance with his general view of the relationship between the *Landnámabók* versions, Jóhannesson considered this particular version to have been *Styrmisbók*.[18] In his preface to *ÍF I* Benediktsson on the whole arrives at the same conclusion, and states

[14] *Sturlunga saga* 1906–11, 5.
[15] ÍF I, 188.
[16] ÍF I, 189.
[17] Jóhannesson 1941, 170. Rafnsson 1974, 176.
[18] Jóhannesson 1941, 106; 165; 169 f.

that the author of *Geirmundar þáttr* could not have known S.[19] Rafnsson has thrown doubt upon the assertion of Jóhannesson and Benediktsson that *Geirmundar þáttr* is based on *Styrmisbók*, but he has pointed out similarities between *Geirmundar þáttr* and M, which are neither found in S or H.[20] The discussion of scholars of the relationship between *Geirmundar þáttr* and *Landnámabók* versions has shown the relationship between the texts to be so complicated that a satisfactory explanation is hard to come by.[21] Jóhannesson's original exposition, i.e. that *Geirmundar þáttr* is related to an old *Landnámabók* version, has not been refuted, and one may well agree with Rafnsson that this version was not *Styrmisbók*. The only conclusion one can draw from the research of the abovementioned scholars is that *Geirmundar þáttr* is based upon an old version of *Landnámabók*. This version may well have been written in the 12th century.[22]

Now we may turn to discuss the passages mentioned. Here S and H are almost identical but the account in *Geirmundar þáttr* is different in some instances. Þ*á gekk Véþjǫrn at blóta* (*til blóts*) (Then Véþjǫrn made a sacrifice) we are told in *Geirmundar þáttr*. In S we read: Þ*á gekk Véþjǫrn at blóti miklu* (Then Véþjǫrn made a great sacrifice) and in H: Þ*á fekk Véþjǫrn at blóti miklu*. (Then Véþjǫrn prepared a great sacrifice.) The difference between the words *gekk/fekk* is perhaps due to an erratic reading of a manuscript but that is not the only possible explanation. The words used in H are the same as used elsewhere in *Landnámabók*. Thus we read e.g. both about Ingólfr and Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi: *fekk at blóti miklu*,[23] where their sacrificial practices are described. Einar Ól. Sveinsson holds that the wording *fekk at blóti* means: gathered the provisions for a sacrifice and draws the analogy with *atfangadagr* (e.g. Christmas Eve: the day of preparation).[24]

Sources mentioning the sacrificial rites of Old Norse religion reveal two types, which Olaf Olsen has termed offering and "convivieoffer".[25] An example of the former is to be found in the description by the Arabian emissary Ibn Fadlān of the practice of Nordic merchants in Russia in 922. He says that as soon as the merchant has cast anchor he takes food offerings ashore which he offers to a wooden idol with a prayer that he may strike a good bargain. If he is successful he slaughters animals and offers a part of the meat to the idols as thanksgiving. In the night dogs devour all the

[19] Benediktsson in ÍF I, CI.
[20] Rafnsson 1974, 176; 207 note 17 and references.
[21] Jóhannesson 1941, 106; 167 ff. Rafnsson 1974, 176 f.
[22] See Rafnsson's stemma in Fig. 2 above.
[23] See Ch. II.1.
[24] Sveinsson in ÍF IV, 7 note 1.
[25] Olsen 1966, 57 f. See further Turville-Petre 1964, 251 f.

meat and then the merchant is convinced that he has favour with his god and master who has accepted the offering.[26]

The first reference to the "convivieoffer" of Norsemen is also found in the works of an Arab scholar, at-Tartusi, who travelled through Northern Germany in the 10th century. He describes the sacrificial feasts of believers in the Norse gods in Schlesvig and writes that there the inhabitants of a certain area all gather together and eat and drink in honour of their god. A person who sacrifices an animal erects a wooden platform outside the door of his house on which he places the animal, whether it is an ox, a ram, a he-goat or a pig. Then all will know that he has offered it as a sacrifice to the glory of his god.[27]

In the Saga of Hákon the Good Snorri Sturluson describes how all the farmers of Thrándheimr brought provisions to the temple and sacrificed there. The blood of the slaughtered animals was sprinkled on the altars and on the walls of the temple as well as on the congregation. The sacrificial cup was passed over the fire and consecrated by the chieftain as well as the sacrificial food. Toasts were drunk and all must join in the ceremonial beer-drinking. Toast of Óðinn was drunk for victory and toasts of Njǫrðr and Freyr for fruitful harvest and for peace.[28]

The Arabian sources of the sacrifices of Nordic pagans rely on contemporary eyewitnesses and must therefore be acceptable evidence.[29] The same cannot be said of Snorri's account which was probably written about 1230.[30] Turville-Petre thinks it probable that Snorri is here following a learned tradition like the one the author of *Eyrbyggja saga* followed when he described the temple of Thór on Snæfellsnes.[31] This may well be true (see Ch. III.1 and there note 5). Turning to the details of Snorri's account we may assume that the beer-drinking had some function in the sacrificial feasts, whatever we think of the toasts.[32] Scholars have disagreed about the sprinkling of the blood but Olaf Olsen has pointed out parallels in other religions such as Mithraism.[33] Here one may also mention the account in Homer when Odysseus resorted to sacrifice and sprinkled the blood of the sacrificed animals on the ghost of Tiresius the Thebian and other ghosts and received news of them in this way.[34] It is therefore possible that the sprinkling of the blood of sacrificed animals had a similar function to the one ascribed to it by Snorri.

[26] Birkeland 1954, 20.
[27] Birkeland 1954, 103 f.
[28] *Heimskringla* 1911, 78.
[29] See further Olsen 1966, 58.
[30] Lie in KL VI 1961, 299 ff. and references.
[31] Turville-Petre 1964, 251 and note 4 and references.
[32] Olsen 1966, 60.
[33] Olsen 1966, 61 and notes 31–34 and references.
[34] *Ódysseifskviða* 1973, 167 ff.

The turn of phrase *fekk at blóti* refers to a "convivieoffer" similar to those described by at-Tartusi and Snorri. It is apt to use this wording about Ingólfr and Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi when the account is of their holding a feast before leaving Norway. But it is strange when it is said of a seafarer, after a long and tough voyage, that he *fekk at blóti miklu*, when he reached a foreign shore after much hardship. The wording of *Geirmundar þáttr*, which simply says *gekk at blóti* (*til blóts*), is much more in line with other circumstances that we are informed about in that story. The account of Vébjǫrn's sacrifice has much more in common with Ibn Fadlān's relation of the merchant's sacrifice than with accounts of "convivieoffers". And Vébjǫrn is said to have sacrificed on reaching shore like the merchant.

The difference between the wording of *Geirmundar þáttr* on the one hand and S and H on the other, is that the account of Vébjǫrn's sacrifice in *Geirmundar þáttr* displays greater integral coherence than the account of the same in S and H. S, and even more so H, seem to have been influenced by other written sources.

S and H contain one item not found in *Geirmundar þáttr* where Vébjǫrn says that Earl Hákon is offering a sacrifice that very same day to harm Vébjǫrn and his brothers and sisters. In *Geirmundar þáttr* we are told of his sacrifice as if it were a natural thing to do on reaching land. In S and H we are given a special reason for Vébjǫrn's sacrifice. The reason being his having to offer sacrifice to ward off the harmful effect of the sacrifice undertaken by Earl Hákon in Norway. The reason is produced because the authors of S and H do not consider it self-evident that a sacrifice should be offered, and it has to be explained. This appears to indicate that when the account in *Geirmundar þáttr* was originally written, a considerably shorter time had passed since paganism was a living force than when the accounts in S and H were written. Another basic difference between these versions can be established on theological grounds. In *Geirmundar þáttr* the sacrifice is of a religious nature but in S and H it has become magic.

It is well known in the history of religions that when religious changes occur the former religion often survives in part in various forms of superstition.[35] The sacrifice in *Geirmundar þáttr*, which in S and H has become magic, therefore also indicates that more time had passed from the acceptance of Christianity when S and H were written than when the account in *Geirmundar þáttr* of Vébjǫrn's sacrifice was written in its present form.

The inherent evidence of these texts therefore confirms the conclusion scholars have drawn for other reasons that *Geirmundar þáttr* is based on an old version of *Landnámabók*.

It is not otherwise known whether the first action of settlers on setting

[35] Ejerfeldt 1968, 286. See further de Vries I 1956, 275 ff.

foot in Iceland was to offer sacrifice. The sources describing their arrivals are very scanty. The reason why the account of Vébjǫrn's sacrifice has been preserved is not that it was so remarkable that he offered sacrifice; it is the incidents which followed the sacrifice which were so outstanding, the latter because they directly followed from the former. The shipwreck and danger which Vébjǫrn landed in with his relatives and retinue were undoubtedly interpreted as a direct consequence of the failure to complete the sacrificial rites, of not paying attention to the sacrifice as was prescribed. If Vébjǫrn had paid attention to the sacrifice, he would have avoided the danger which awaited the ship offshore. It is hard to tell whether it was believed that their hazardous escape represented a measure of success: that the sacrifice was not completely inefficacious.

3. Hallowing land

In *Landnámabók*, S and H, it says of Ingólfr:

Þá er Ingólfr sá Ísland, skaut hann fyrir borð ǫndugissúlum sínum til heilla; hann mælti svá fyrir, at hann skyldi þar byggja, er súlurnar kæmi á land.[36] (When Ingólfr saw Iceland, he threw overboard his high-seat pillars for good fortune; he solemnly declared that where the pillars came to land he would build his home.)

And of Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi it says in *Eyrbyggja saga:*

Þórólfr kastaði þá fyrir borð ǫndvegissúlum sínum, þeim er staðið hǫfðu í hofinu; þar var Þórr skorinn á annarri. Hann mælti svá fyrir, at hann skyldi þar byggja á Íslandi, sem Þórr léti þær á land koma.[37] (Then Þórólfr threw overboard the high-seat pillars from his temple; the image of Thór was carved on one of them. He solemnly declared that where Thór brought them to land in Iceland he would build his home.)

When Þórólf's high-seat pillars were found we are told the following:

. . . ok fundu á nesi framanverðu . . . . . at Þórr var á land kominn með súlurnar.[38] (. . . and found at the point of a headland. . . . . that Thór had reached shore with the pillars.)

These texts have in common with those mentioned before (Ch. II.1–2 above) the fact that the accounts of Ingólfr in *Landnámabók* and Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi in *Eyrbyggja saga* are very similar. The difference is that, whereas Ingólf's pillars were washed ashore, Thór carried Þórólf's pillars to the shore and thus took an active interest in the affairs of his protégé.

It is difficult to assess the source-value of accounts of settlers throwing their high-seat pillars overboard and deciding to build their farms where

[36] ÍF I, 42.
[37] ÍF IV, 7.
[38] ÍF IV, 8.

they were washed ashore. Some of the scholars on this subject accept it literally that the settlers conducted themselves in this manner.[39] It is no doubt correct, as Dag Strömbäck argues, that a similar method of choosing a settlement has ancient roots in Nordic countries.[40] The accounts may therefore not be foreign to a Nordic way of thought. But given the fact that 350 years had passed when this was written in its extant form I think it dangerous to interpret the sources literally. In *Landnámabók* there are also accounts of other objects, such as Kveldúlf's chest[41] and Ørlyg's iron bell[42], which were carried ashore where the settlers were ordained to settle, but hardly anyone takes these accounts seriously.[43] We are also reminded of the account in *Landnámabók* (H) of Illugi Halldórsson's church timber thrown overboard so it could be washed ashore where the deceased hermit, Ásólfr, thought fit.[44] Here the holy man plays the same role as Thór does in *Eyrbyggja saga*, but we do not know which tale may be influenced by which.

Scholars do not agree as to whether the *ǫndvegissúlur* (high-seat pillars) were a part of the old high-seat or were the main pillars of the hall or neither of these.[45] Be that as it may it must have been inconvenient for the settlers when all their building work was going on to be without the pillars for several years or may be for good. Bearing in mind this and all the facts mentioned above it is a moot question whether the pillars were thrown overboard in the way our sources suggest. To arrive at a plausible conclusion requires a more thorough study than it is possible to undertake here; but in the absence of such an investigation I think it fit to treat all these accounts with caution.

Landnámabók and *Íslendingasögur* tell of other objects of veneration which the settlers took with them over the sea. There are also accounts of how they consecrated their new land to the pagan gods. Of Þórhaddr it says in *Landnámabók*, S and H:

Þórhaddr enn gamli var hofgoði í Þrándheimi á Mœri(ni). Hann fýstisk til Íslands ok tók áðr ofan hofit ok hafði með sér hofsmoldina ok súlurnar, en hann kom í Stǫðvarfjǫrð ok lagði Mœrina-helgi á allan fjǫrðinn ok lét øngu tortíma nema kvikfé heimilu.[46] (Þórhaddr the Old was a temple-priest in Trøndelag at Mære. He desired to go to Iceland, and first took down his

[39] Strömbäck 1970, 130. Jóhannesson 1956, 43 f. Holmqvist in KL VII 1962, 292. Þorsteinsson in KL X 1965, 209.
[40] Strömbäck 1970, 130.
[41] ÍF I, 70. See further ÍF II, 71 f. and 72 note 1.
[42] ÍF I, 55.
[43] See nevertheless Þorsteinsson in KL X 1965, 209.
[44] ÍF I, 65.
[45] Holmqvist in KL VII 1962, 292 and references.
[46] ÍF I, 307 ff.

temple and took with him earth from the floor and its pillars; and he came to Stǫðvarfjǫrðr and made the whole fjord a sanctuary, and let nothing be destroyed there except permitted livestock.)

It is uncertain what standing Þórhaddr had in Norway, or whether with his religious position he also had any political power as a chieftain. In *Sk* he is said to have been a chieftain (*hǫfðingi*) and in Þ he is said to have been a great chieftain (*hǫfðingi mikill*).[47] According to *Heimskringla* Mære in Trøndelag was a great place of sacrifice.[48] From other sources it is known that temple-priests maintained temples but did not always have other authority.[49]

Of Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi it says in *Eyrbyggja saga: Hann tók ofan hofit ok hafði með sér flesta viðu, þá er þar hǫfðu í verit, ok svá moldina undan stallanum, þar er Þórr hafði á setit.*[50] (He took down his temple and took with him most of its timber and earth from under the stall on which Thór had been seated.) And according to *Landnámabók*, S and H, Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi consecrated the land around his sanctuary and landtake in a similar way to Þórhaddr: *Hét hann því at helga Þór allt landnám sitt ok kenna við hann.*[51] (He promised to consecrate all his land-take to Thór and call it after him.) On Þórólf's land the cattle and men were sacred as at Stǫðvarfjǫrðr: *Hann hafði svá mikinn átrúnað á fjall þat, er stóð í nesinu, er hann kallaði Helgafell, at þangat skyldi engi maðr óþveginn líta, ok þar var svá mikil friðhelgi, at øngu skyldi granda í fjallinu, hvárki fé né mǫnnum, nema sjálft gengi á braut.*[52] (He had so great faith in that mountain which stood on the headland and which he called Helgafell, that no man was allowed to look upon it unwashed, and there was so great a holiness there that it was forbidden to harm man or beast on the mountain, unless it went off on its own.)

Ásbjǫrn Reyrketilsson hallowed his land-take according to S and H: *Ásbjǫrn helgaði landnám sitt Þór ok kallaði Þórsmǫrk.*[53] (Ásbjǫrn consecrated his land-take to Thór and called it Þórsmǫrk.)

Of some of the settlers it is said that they took land or hallowed themselves land by circling it with fire without any mention of the gods. Thus we are told of Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi in *Eyrbyggja saga: Eptir þat fór Þórólfr eldi um landnám sitt, útan frá Stafá ok inn til þeirar ár, er hann*

[47] ÍF I, 307 note 12. Skarðsárbók 1958, 143.
[48] ÍF XXVI, 172; 315 ff.
[49] Sigfússon in ÍF X, 169 note 3. Turville-Petre 1964, 260. Halvorsen in KL VII 1962, 4 f.
[50] ÍF IV, 7.
[51] ÍF I, 124.
[52] ÍF I, 125.
[53] ÍF I, 346.

kallaði Hofsá.[54] (After this Þórólfr travelled round his land-take planting fires from Stafá river to the river he called Hofsá.) And of Helgi the Lean we read in *Landnámabók*, S and H: *Helgi. . . gerði eld mikinn við hvern vatnsós ok helgaði sér svá allt herað.*[55] (Helgi. . . lit a fire at the mouth of every river and thus hallowed the whole district.) Similar accounts exist of the activity of other settlers.[56] Sometimes this appears connected with religion. *Landnámabók*, S and H, says of Jǫrundr Hrafnsson: *Bjórr lá ónuminn . . . þat land fór Jǫrundr eldi ok lagði til hofs.*[57] (A slice of land had not been taken. . . . . this territory Jǫrundr circled with fire and set aside for a temple.)

It cannot be asserted that the accounts in *Landnámabók* and *Eyrbyggja saga* of the temple soil, which Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi and Þórhaddr are said to have transported to Iceland, prove their devotion to the pagan gods. The same is true of these as of the high-seat pillars that *Landnámabók* relates the parallel behaviour of a Christian settler, where Bishop Patrekr is said to have given Ørlygr blessed soil on which to build his church.[58] It is not impossible that contemporary ideas on the sacred objects of Catholic people may have influenced the authors when recording these legends.[59]

Accounts of the way in which settlers hallowed territory by circling it with fires appear to be based on sounder legends. Dag Strömbäck has dealt at length with these legends and compared them with parallels from elsewhere in Scandinavia. He argues convincingly that this custom is rooted in ancient superstition which was widespread in the Nordic cultural zone.[60] On the other hand it is very difficult to assess the links of both these customs—i.e. hallowing land by fire and throwing pillars overboard—with gods and religion. As shown above (Ch. II.3), this is sometimes said to be connected with religion. Thór carries the pillars to the shore, he has land hallowed him and land is set aside for a temple. More often this behaviour is described without any mention of this. These accounts then tell us little about the heathen religion of the settlers while it cannot be denied that they are supporting evidence to some extent.

The legend of Helgafell may have some roots in the pagan religion. In *Eyrbyggja saga* there is an account of Þorsteinn þorskabítr (cod-biter) being welcomed in the mountain after his death.[61] This can possibly reflect

[54] ÍF IV, 8.
[55] ÍF I, 252; 251.
[56] ÍF I, 229; 234.
[57] ÍF I, 350.
[58] ÍF I, 52 f.
[59] See Lárusson in KL VI 1961, 333 ff. and references.
[60] Strömbäck 1970, 142 ff.; 149.
[61] ÍF IV, 19.

pagan ideology.[62] Helgafell also has an important function in *Eyrbyggja saga*, where it states that for a long time affairs have been settled for everybody's good at that mountain.[63]

4. Godless settlers

Of some of the settlers it is stated specifically that they put faith in no god: *Hjǫrleifr vildi aldri blóta* (Hjǫrleifr would never sacrifice) it says of the fosterbrother of Ingólfr, to whom reference was made above.[64] Of another settler it says: *Hallr goðlauss hét maðr; hann var son Helga goðlauss. Þeir feðgar vildu ekki blóta ok trúðu á mátt sinn.*[65] (Hallr the Godless was the name of a man; he was son of Helgi the Godless. Neither father nor son was willing to sacrifice but believed in his own strength.) Another man has the nickname but nothing else is said about his faith.[66] In the *Konungasögur* and *Íslendingasögur* reference is also made to men who believe in their own might and main.[67] In some of the sources where such references appear it seems to me that it is a question of sorcery or supernatural power, sometimes similar in nature to *mana*.[68] One need not assume, however, that the Icelandic settlers who believed in their own strength believed in magic or a divine power dwelling in themselves; rather they would in most cases have trusted in and relied upon their physical strength and intelligence.[69]

5. Mixed faith

One settler, Helgi the Lean, is said to have believed both in Christ and Thór according to S and H: *Helgi var blandinn mjǫk í trú; hann trúði á Krist, en hét á Þór til sjófara ok harðræða.*[70] (Helgi was a man of very mixed faith; he believed in Christ but called on Thór for voyages and hard undertakings.) As soon as Helgi saw Iceland he is said to have taken counsel with Thór about where he should take land, but he christened his farm in Eyjafjǫrðr Kristnes.[71] In H it says that Helgi's son, Ingjaldr, had a temple erected on his farm.[72]

[62] Strömbäck 1975, 46 f.
[63] ÍF IV, 72.
[64] See Ch. II.1 above.
[65] ÍF I, 48. In H Hall's father is Þórir goðlauss (ÍF I, 49).
[66] ÍF I, 88 f.
[67] *Heimskringla* 1911, 394. ÍF XIV, 9.
[68] Ström 1948, 52 ff.; 71.
[69] Turville-Petre 1964, 265. de Vries I 1956, 277 f.
[70] ÍF I, 250 f.
[71] ÍF I, 252 f.
[72] ÍF I, 253.

6. Christian settlers

Finally it is said of some settlers that they were Christians. About Auðr djúpúðga (the Deep-minded) it says in S and H: *Hon hafði bænahald sitt á Krosshólum; þar lét hon reisa krossa, því at hon var skírð ok vel trúuð. Þar hǫfðu frændr hennar síðan átrúnað mikinn á hólana. Var (þar) þá gǫr hǫrg, er blót tóku til.*[73] (She said her prayers at Krosshólar; there she had crosses raised, because she was baptised and pious. Later her relations placed great faith in these mounds. Pagan altars were erected there when sacrificing started.)

Here we are told that the descendants of Auðr the Deep-minded were converted to paganism. The same is said of other descendants of Christian settlers as related below.

Ketill fiflski was another Christian settler and the following is told of him in S: *hann fór af Suðreyjum til Íslands; (hann) var kristinn . . . Ketill bjó í Kirkjubœ; þar hǫfðu áðr setit papar, ok eigi máttu þar heiðnir menn búa.*[74] (He went from the Hebrides to Iceland and was a Christian. . . Ketill lived at Kirkjubær; Irish monks had lived there before and no heathen men could live there.)

According to one report, preserved in *Ól.Tr.m.* and *Kristni saga*, Christianity remained with the descendants of Ketill at Kirkjubær right till the time it was established by law in Iceland.[75]

At the end of S and H 6 settlers are mentioned who had been baptiesed and it is added that there were other Christians among those who came over the Atlantic from the British Isles. In addition to those referred to above we find Ørlygr the old, Helgi bjóla and Jǫrundr the Christian. Then we are told: *En þat gekk óvíða í ættir, því at synir þeira sumra reistu hof ok blótuðu ok land var alheiðit nær hundruði vetra.*[76] (But it was seldom adhered to by their descendants for the sons of some of them built temples and offered sacrifices and the country was wholly pagan for almost 120 years.)

The same then was true of these as of the descendants of Auðr the Deep-minded. These accounts certainly suggest that Christianity which some of the settlers adhered to was not of long duration. The same is suggested by the account of the descendants of Ketill fiflski where it is found remarkable that his kin should continue to adhere to Christianity until the conversion of the country.

One instance could possibly indicate influence from the Christian faith of the settlers from the British Isles. In *Landnámabók*, S, we are told:

[73] ÍF I, 139 f.

[74] ÍF I, 322; 324. In H (ÍF I, 323) it is added that Ketill was a good Christian.

[75] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 156. ASB 11, 21. *Ól.Tr.m.* and *Kristni saga* will be discussed later, Ch. V.4 ff. below.

[76] ÍF I, 396.

Svartkell hét maðr katneskr . . . Hans son var Þorkell faðir Glúms, er svá baðsk fyrir at krossi: "Gott ey gǫmlum mǫnnum, gott ey ærum mǫnnum."[77] (Svartkell was the name of a man from Caithness. . . His son was Þorkell, Glúm's father, who said this prayer at the cross: "Good *ey* to old men, good *ey* to young men".)

Jón Helgason thinks it likely that *ey* in Glúm's prayer is derived from *auja* which means luck or good fortune, and the evidence in favour of such an interpretation is very persuasive.[78] Einar Ól. Sveinsson has pointed out that Glúm's prayer has the characteristic stamp of Irish prayers, and believes it more likely that Glúmr had learnt the prayer from old men in the district or his grandfather than from one of the missionaries who came to the country in the latter part of the tenth century.[79] In H it says that Glúmr accepted Christianity in his old age.[80] Chronologically that could be so and it does not exclude the possibility that Glúmr learnt the prayer in this way from his grandfather or other old people. However Glúmr came by his prayer, Jón Helgason's conjecture about the maning of *ey* of course retains its validity.

7. Superstitious belief

In *Landnámabók* there are a few stories which have been considered evidence of superstitious belief among the settlers and decline of faith in the gods. In H it says of Ásgeirr kneif that he *hafnaði sjálfráði blótum*[81] (abandoned sacrificing of his own free will), and it has been thought that this showed that belief in the gods was waning.[82] The remark about Ásgeir's religious life is neither in S nor M and Jón Jóhannesson considers it a later addition whose cause can probably be traced to the sanctity of Ásgeir's descendants, the bishops Jón and Þorlákr.[83] Jóhannesson has a case here.

Björn M. Ólsen refers to Þórir snepill, Eyvindr Loðinsson and Þorsteinn rauðnefr in discussing superstitions in the last century of heathendom.[84] *Landnámabók* refers to the faith of these men. In S and H it says: *Þórir. . . bjó at Lundi; hann blóta*ði lundinn.[85] (Þórir. . . lived at Lundr; he made the grove the object of his sacrificing.) About Eyvindr it says in S and H: *Eyvin-*

[77] ÍF I, 56. In H (ÍF I, 57) it is said that Svartkell came from England and there Caithness is not mentioned.
[78] Helgason 1928, 377 ff.
[79] Sveinsson 1945, 203. The same author 1948, 39; 150 ff.
[80] ÍF I, 57.
[81] ÍF I, 341.
[82] Ólsen 1900, 8.
[83] Jóhannesson 1941, 179. See further ÍF I, 341 note 7.
[84] Ólsen 1900, 8.
[85] ÍF I, 270 f.

dr... nam Flateyjardal upp til Gunnsteina ok blótaði þá.[86] (Eyvindr ... settlet Flateyjardalr as far as Gunnsteinar and made the stones the object of his sacrificing.) And of Þorsteinn rauðnefr it says in S and H: *Þorsteinn rauðnefr var blótmaðr mikill; hann blótaði forsinn ok skyldi bera leifar allar á forsinn.*[87] (Þorsteinn rauðnefr was a great heathen worshipper; he made the waterfall the object of his sacrifice and all food remains were to be carried to the fall.) In discussing what Björn M. Ólsen says, Bishop Jón Helgason writes in his *Kristni saga*: "Men worshipped different kind of natural objects such as stones, trees, waterfalls..."[88]

In this case it seems to me that these scholars may have taken the words of *Landnámabók* about the faith of the heathen settlers too literally. It must be borne in mind that when the oldest *Landnámabók* was written 200 years had passed from the time when the men referred to in it had lived, and there is a great risk that the accounts about divine worship and religious activity had been distorted or recreated. And as we have seen above (Ch. II.2) there is also the likelihood that the accounts of paganism in *Landnámabók* were distorted in its younger versions. I think it is therefore essential to be extremely cautious when interpreting these texts. In my opinion it is not necessary to interpret the words about Þórir snepill and Eyvindr Loðinsson, that they made the grove and stones the objects of their worship, to mean that they put faith in the grove as such, or the trees in it, and the stones. It is possible that what is mentioned here is only an ancient reference to the place of worhisp of these men in pagan times—Þórir had carried out his religious acts in the grove and Eyvindr had made his sacrifices at the rocks. This conforms more with what is known about religious practices in the northern countries in heathen times where important places of worship were sacred groves and altars in natural surroundings.[89]

Here we can also mention the provision of the Gulaþing law where pagan sacrifices are prohibited in these words: ... *vér skulum eigi blóta heiðit guð, né hauga, né hǫrga.*[90] (We are not to worship heathen gods, cairns or altars.) Here all are mentioned at once, the god, the cairn and the altar, and this wording undeniably resembles the wording of *Landnámabók* about worshipping the grove and the stones. This comparison therefore supports the hypothesis that here we have traces of what was remembered of the religion of the above-mentioned settlers.

Þorsteinn rauðnefr is called *blótmaðr mikill*, like Végeirr and Þórólfr

[86] ÍF I, 273.
[87] ÍF I, 358.
[88] Helgason 1925, 9.
[89] Turville-Petre 1964, 237 ff. Olsen 1966, 103 ff. Lid in NK XXVI, 90. See further Eldjárn in KL VII, 8–10 and Foote and Wilson 1970, 398 f.
[90] Norges gamle love... 1846, 18.

Mostrarskeggi. In the light of what has been said of the others, it seems best to interpret the statement about Þorsteinn as meaning that he was a man earnest in his faith and one who performed his religious duties with sincerity. On the other hand, this does not conform to what is said about him, that he made the waterfall the object of his sacrificing, and that he put some kind of trust in the fall as such. In my opinion there is no need to regard these two ideas as antithetical, and it will be much better to judge the remark about the waterfall in the light of what it says about Þorsteinn in the following passage: *hann var ok framsýnn mjǫk*[91] (he was also very foresighted). Foresight seems sometimes to have had associations with waterfalls, and there is a very clear reference to this in the *Jómsvíkingadrápa* by Bjarni Kolbeinsson: *Varkak fróðr und forsum*[92] (I did not become wise beneath waterfalls). "To become wise beneath waterfalls" has been interpreted as meaning to procure knowledge about the future by means of magic. The fall seems to have been instrumental in making it easy for those seeking second sight to achieve that condition which was necessary to learn the future. A pagan who did this had no reason to put less trust in his gods or neglect them for that reason.[93] It does not follow that there is any contradiction in the statement that Þorsteinn was a great sacrificer and that he looked into the future under the fall near his home.

In the light of what has been said, it appears we must be wary of accepting Þórir snepill, Eyvindr Loðinsson and Þorsteinn rauðnefr as representatives of superstition or declining belief in the gods. Certainly, we have only slight reference to their faith and religious practices, but the little that is said may just as well signify that they practised their faith with painstaking sincerity.

Dag Strömbäck has pointed out how much better versed the 13th-century writers were in the superstition of their contemporaries than in the pagan religion of the 10th century,[94] and above (Ch. II.2) we have shown how beliefs change into superstition in younger works. Bearing this in mind, the hypothesis that there is a core of religious description in the superstitious accounts of the above settlers receives added support.

8. The origin of the settlers

Landnámabók mentions over 400 settlers.[95] About 130 of these are said to have come from Norway, but roughly 50 from the British Isles. It is seldom said how long the latter had lived there and sometimes only their names

[91] ÍF I, 358.
[92] Skj. B 2, 1. A 2, 2.
[93] LP 1966, 156. About the connection between sacrifice and knowledge about the future see Meissner 1917, 6 ff. See further Ch. IV.3 ff. below.
[94] Strömbäck 1935, 2 f. See further above Ch. I.2.
[95] Rafnsson 1974, 221–25 counts 435 settlers.

suggest that they stem from there. Of over half the settlers there is no mention from where they came.[96]

At this period of time, the second half of the ninth century and the early 10th century it is thought that Norway was wholly pagan.[97] We must therefore conclude that the settlers from there were heathen. There is a specific mention of some of the settlers from the British Isles having been Christian (Ch. II.6) but it can hardly be concluded that all the settlers coming from there were Christian.

Little can be concluded about the faith of those settlers whose place of origin is not mentioned. It may, however, be assumed that a considerable number came from Norway and was thus probably heathen. It can be assumed that those who came from Denmark or Sweden were of the same faith. It is therefore likely that the settlers of unknown extract were rather pagan than Christian.[98]

It is thought probable that the settlers who came from the British Isles brought along a substantial number of Celtic people, slaves, freed slaves and servants.[99] We can assume that most of these people were Christian. They were however mainly lower class and it is thought that these people soon adopted the language of the country and that their own language left no significant traces.[100] One can therefore conclude with some confidence that the influence of these people was not much greater in other fields.

Archeological remains are scanty from the pagan period (c. 870–1000), mainly consisting of burial places and objects connected with them.[101] 312 burial places have been found on 151 sites (1967). These are unevenly distributed round the country and vary in the quality of preservation.[102] Archeologists have placed most of them in the 10th century and excavation data confirm written accounts of Nordic settlement close to the year 900.[103] The objects found in the burial places have almost without exception been placed in the 10th century and a survey of all the sites shows that pagan burial rites were not continued to any extent in the 11th century.[104] This conclusion accords well with the historical date of the end of paganism.

The conclusion that can be drawn from archeological remains and written sources about the origin of the settlers indicates that a substantial number of them was heathen.

[96] Benediktsson in ÍF I, CXXX.
[97] Kolsrud 1958, 124 f.
[98] Þorsteinsson in KL X 1965, 208–10 and references.
[99] Benediktsson in ÍF I, CXXXII.
[100] Benediktsson in ÍF I, CXXXII. Jóhannesson 1956, 30 ff.
[101] Eldjárn 1956, 426 ff.
[102] Eldjárn 1974, 112; 133 ff. and references.
[103] Eldjárn 1956, 428. See further Eldjárn in KL V 1960, 445 ff. and references.
[104] Eldjárn 1956, 428 f.

Résumé

Landnámabók and *Íslendingasögur* are reticent on the faith and religious activity of the settlers. Some of the extant texts reveal accounts of sacrifices in Norway which indicate communion sacrificial feasts similar to what is known from contemporary and younger sources about Nordic paganism. One account of sacrifice on making land in Iceland has, in the oldest version preserved in *Geirmundar þáttr*, a plausible description of a religious ceremony, whereas in later versions, S and H, the account has taken in more elements of witchcraft and magic.

The connection of a possible activity of the settlers, where they are said to have thrown their high-seat pillars overboard and built their homes where they were washed ashore, with the heathen religion is not clear. It is also dangerous to conclude anything about their religion on the evidence of accounts of sacred objects which they are said to have brought along, e.g. temple soil and timber, both of which have parallels in accounts of Christian settlers.

The activity of the settlers when hallowing land appears to be rooted in very ancient Nordic superstition and sometimes this is mentioned as closely connected with the gods and temples. This could indicate a close relationship with the heathen worship even though this cannot be asserted. Accounts of the hallowing of big areas and a mountain are related to great worshippers and this points to a link between such activity and the heathen worship.

Three of the settlers are said to have no god and one worships both Christ and Thór.

Several of the settlers are said to be Christian and six of them are mentioned by name. There are lengthy accounts of their faith and religious activity of some of these. These descriptions are probably the results of the bias of the authors of S and H for ecclesiastical history writing which has been argued above (Ch. I.1). These descriptions are absent in M.

Superstition and waning religious fervour of the settlers are not as discernible as has often been supposed. The accounts of the settlers' religion sometimes have a superstitious flavour in the works of 13th-century writers.

What can be judged from the sources about the origin of the settlers indicates that a substantial number were heathen. Other aspects dealt with in this chapter support basically the same conclusion.

III. Pagan gods in Iceland

1. Temples

In *Landnámabók* and *Íslendingasögur* thirteen temples (*hof*) are mentioned which are said to have been raised by settlers and their sons.[1] Recollections of many more temples have been preserved in the sagas and in place-names.[2] Opinion varies as to the reliability of these sources. Many older scholars accepted them fully[3] but younger scholars have been more cautious in their interpretation and have gone as far as to claim that temples were not erected as separate buildings in Iceland.[4] Before continuing let us take a closer look at the sources.

In *Eyrbyggja saga* the temple of Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi is described in this way: *Þar lét hann reisa hof, ok var þat mikit hús; váru dyrr á hliðvegginum ok nær ǫðrum endanum; þar fyrir innan stóðu ǫndvegissúlurnar ok váru þar í naglar; þeir hétu reginnaglar; þar var allt friðarstaðr fyrir innan. Innar af hofinu var hús í þá líking, sem nú er sǫnghús í kirkjum, ok stóð þar stalli á miðju gólfi sem altari, ok lá þar á hringr einn mótlauss, tvítøgeyringr, ok skyldi þar at sverja eiða alla, þann hring skyldi hofgoði hafa á hendi sér til allra mannfunda. Á stallanum skyldi ok standa hlautbolli, ok þar í hlautteinn sem stǫkkull væri, ok skyldi þar støkkva með ór bollanum blóði því, er hlaut var kallat; þat var þess konar blóð, er svæfð váru þau kvikendi, er goðunum var fórnat. Umhverfis stallann var goðunum skipat í afhúsinu.*[5] (There he had a temple erected, and it was a great building. The doorway was in the side wall towards one end; inside stood high-seat pillars and in them were fastened nails; these were called "nails of the gods"; within there was a place of refuge. Further in there was a room shaped like the choir in churches now, and on the floor in the middle of the room stood a platform like an altar; and on it lay a ring, open in one place, twenty ounces in weight, on which all men were to swear their oaths. The temple-priest was obliged to wear this ring on his arm at all meetings. On the platform should stand the sacrificial bowl and in it the sacrificial twig

[1] ÍF I, 471. Briem 1945, 137. *Hof* here is translated with temple. It might mean a farmstead for cult celebration. See Foote and Wilson 1970, 398. See further Kuhn 1971, 163 f.

[2] Briem 1945, 187. Jóhannesson 1956, 78 f. Lárusson 1942, 74 ff.

[3] Eldjárn in KL VII 1962, 8–10 and references.

[4] Olsen 1966, 112. Foote and Wilson 1970, 398 f.

[5] ÍF IV, 8 f.

which was like an aspergill; with it they sprinkled blood from the bowl; this blood was called sacrifical blood and was the blood of those animals which were killed as an offering to the gods. Around the platform in this side-room were arranged images of the gods.)

The source-value of *Eyrbyggja saga* was discussed above (Ch. II.1), and the chapter quoted here, according to Einar Ól. Sveinsson, was probably taken by the author from Ari the Wise or one of his disciples.[6] Olaf Olsen finds the evidence for this argument unsatisfactory and doubts the value of the chapter as a source about heathen temples.[7] At this stage of research I shall not attempt to evaluate these different views. One element in discussions about this has been the correspondence or lack of it between the description of the temple in *Eyrbyggja saga* and the alleged temple-site at Hofstaðir in Mývatnssveit, which Daniel Bruun and Finnur Jónsson excavated in 1908.[8] Olsen recently studied the site at Hofstaðir and his conclusion was that this had been a farmhouse. He suggested that the building of the pagan *hof* in Iceland was in fact identical with the feast hall of a large farm.[9] This may well be the case but in my opinion one must hesitate to let the source-value of *Eyrbyggja saga* or the question of temples in pagan Iceland stand or fall on this one temple-site. The matter must remain in the balance until more evidence is forthcoming.

In Hauk's *Landnámabók, Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts* and other old works there is preserved a chapter about the heathen laws, *Úlfljótslǫg*, and there it says: *Baugr tvíeyringr eða meiri skyldi liggja í hverju hǫfuðhofi á stalla; þann baug skyldi hverr goði hafa á hendi sér til lǫgþinga allra, þeira er hann skyldi sjálfr heyja, ok rjóða hann þar áðr í roðru nautsblóðs þess, er hann blótaði þar sjálfr. Hverr sá maðr, er þar þurfti lǫgskil af hendi at leysa at dómi, skyldi áðr eið vinna at þeim baugi ok nefna sér vátta tvá eða fleiri. "Nefni ek í þat vætti", skyldi hann segja, "at ek vinn eið at baugi, lǫgeið; hjálpi mér svá Freyr ok Njǫrðr ok hinn almáttki áss, sem ek mun svá sǫk þessa sækja eða verja eða vitni bera eða kviðu eða dóma, sem ek veit réttast ok sannast ok helzt at lǫgum, ok ǫll lǫgmæt skil af hendi leysa, þau er undir mik koma, meðan ek em á þessu þingi".*[10] (A ring of two-ounce weight or more should lie in each main temple on the altar; this ring the priest should have on his arm at all general assemblies which he himself has charge of, and he should redden it beforehand with the red blood of an oxe which he himself has sacrificed there. Every man who needed to perform

[6] Sveinsson in ÍF IV, XIII f. and references. See further Turville-Petre 1964, 241; 251 and references.

[7] Olsen 1966, 29.

[8] Bruun og Jónsson 1909, 258 ff. Olsen 1966, 185 ff. ÍF IV, 8 note 2. See further Eldjárn 1974, 111 f.

[9] Ólsen 1966, 190 ff.; 284 f.

[10] ÍF I, 313 and 315. See further Flateyjarbók I 1860, 249.

any legal business at the court, should first swear an oath on that ring and name two or more witnesses. He should say, "I name witnesses that I swear an oath on the ring, a lawful oath; so help me Freyr and Njǫrðr and the almighty god insofar as I shall prosecute this case or defend it or bear witness or give verdicts or pass sentences, as I know to be most right and true and closest to the law; and perform all lawful acts that fall upon me while I am at this assembly".) At the end of the passage a closer reference is made to the main temples; there should be three in each district, and it is stated that every man should pay dues to the temple.[11]

In *Hørg, hov og kirke*, Olaf Olsen examines this chapter *Úlfljótslǫg* in painstaking detail. In the main his conclusions are that we are dealing here with an antiquarian attempt to recreate the legislation of heathendom on the basis of unreliable traditions and with regard to prevailing customs. He argues that we have no evidence to prove this chapter was based on heathen law. Olsen expresses no doubt, however, that the oath was made on a ring but rejects the preamble to the oath as Christian invention. He also casts doubt on the belief that the idea of a main temple is a pagan one, and considers it by no means certain that dues were paid to temples.[12]

Of course it is difficult to disprove Olsen's theories. Everything suggests that this law passage was written down around 1200 and was in Styrmisbók.[13] We cannot trace it further back. On the other hand, Olsen's arguments that the law is the invention of learned men are not always convincing. In this connection we can mention an essay by Peter Foote "Observation on 'syncretism' in early Icelandic Christianity" in which he discusses the oath of *Úlfljótslǫg* and its present form.[14] Foote holds that if the oath is an invention of learned men it is not evidence of "syncretism", but he argues strongly that the wording of the oath does not preclude it being coined before the acceptance of Christianity. We have no evidence according to Foote that the verb *hjálpa* could not have been used in such a context before the Conversion and cannot know for sure that a sense of "completely strong" for *almáttigr* was impossible in pre-Christian time. Foote correctly points out the fact that the 10th century was the age of syncretism and if the oath is old and valid it is likely that it was formed in that period, which could explain the Christian flavour of the wording.[15] I find Foote's last argument particularly important, for if the oath was introduced in the 10th century it was to serve a definite purpose, but I see little reason why

[11] ÍF I, 315.
[12] Olsen 1966, 39 ff.; 49.
[13] Benediktsson in ÍF I, C. Jóhannesson 1941, 162; 212. Rafnsson 1974, 82 note 5. Olsen 1966, 34 ff. and references.
[14] Foote 1974, 79 ff.
[15] Foote 1974, 80 f.

learned men in the 13th century should have wanted to construct the oath. Attempts have been made to interpret *áss hinn almáttki* as Ull, Týr, Óðinn and Thór.[16] In light of what has been referred to here *áss hinn almáttki* (the all-powerful god) can scarcely be other than Thór.[17]

Several of Olsen's other arguments do not appear very convincing. Even though the word *hǫfuðhof* (Main-temple) may have been influenced by the word *hǫfuðkirkja* (Main-church), that in itself does not prove that there was no difference in degree between temples. And *hǫfuð* to mean "main" is common usage in other connections. The compilers could have used this word to imply a real difference between the pagan temples. The same thing applies to the temple tax. Even if the word *tollr*, which is found in sources from 1200[18] with reference to this payment, could be from Latin, that in no ways proves that money was not paid to temples. There is good authority to show that money was given to temples and property donated to them. Ari the Wise mentions in *Íslendingabók* that Grímr geitskǫr gave to the temples money which he received for exploring the country before the General Assembly was established in 930.[19] In *Landnámabók*, M, S and H, it explains how land was laid aside for a temple: *Jǫrundr . . . gerði þar hof mikit. Bjórr lá ónuminn . . . þat land fór Jǫrundr eldi ok lagði til hofs.*[20] (Jǫrundr raised a great temple there. A piece of land lay unsettlet . . . Jǫrundr went around the land with fire and consecrated it to the temple.) Similar action was used in Jǫkuldal: *Teigr lá ónuminn . . . þann lǫgðu þeir til hofs, ok heitir sá nú Hofsteigr.*[21] (A strip of land lay unsettled. . . they laid it aside for the temple, and the place is now called Hofsteigr.) As far as the second example is concerned we must be cautious for it could be an explanation of a place-name.

Jón Jóhannesson has rightly pointed out that property would not be assigned to temples unless they were intended to discharge some important role in the community, and that the fact that Grímr geitskǫr gave his reward to the temples is a clear indication that the men who established the General Assembly wished to promote the pagan religion of the country.[22] The altar-ring which is said to have lain in the temple, on which oaths were sworn and which the temple-priest wore on his arm to law-assemblies, points also to the fact that temporal power was linked with faith in heathen times. Belief and sacrifice was an important part of man's life.[23]

[16] Pálsson 1956, 187 ff. Scovazzi 1960, 352 ff. de Vries 1931, 46 ff. Turville-Petre 1964, 86 and notes 7–9 and references.

[17] See further Turville-Petre 1964, 86.

[18] Olsen 1966, 44 and references.

[19] ÍF I, 7. The source-value of *Íslendingabók* will be discussed below (Ch. V.1).

[20] ÍF I, 350 f. and note 3. See further Ch. II.3 above.

[21] ÍF I.294.

[22] Jóhannesson 1956, 74 f.

[23] See further Strömbäck 1975, 43 ff.

The main conclusion of our present discussion of temples in Iceland is that it has not been proved beyond doubt that pagan temples were erected as special buildings there. Nevertheless I find the evidence points to the existence of temples[24]—or special farmsteads for cult celebration[25]—rather than to the contrary. Topographical and habitation names must here be considered important as well as the fact that Ari the Wise asserts that there were temples in Iceland. Having said this it remains true that at this stage it is too early to expand on the subject of temples in Iceland. In that field we must await the expert opinion of archeologists, who have sites to investigate in every part of the country, the socalled "temple ruins" (*hoftóftir*). For far too long—since 1908—these have not been excavated but they may well throw new light on the case at issue between fact and fiction.

2. The worship of Thór

In *Snorra-Edda* there are preserved two hymns from the last decades of Icelandic paganism where Thór is addressed directly in the second person. In one of them, a verse by Vetrliði Sumarliðason, it says:

Leggi brauzt Leiknar,
lamðir Þrívalda,
steypðir Starkeði,
stétt of Gjǫlp dauða.[26]

(You broke the limbs of Leikn, you beat Þrívaldi, you knocked down Starkað, you stood over the dead body of Gjálp.)

The poet Vetrliði is known from other sources. He is mentioned in *Landnámabók*, S and H, as the descendant of the settler Ketill hængr and there we are also told that Thangbrandr and Guðleifr Arason killed Vetrliði for lampooning them.[27] The event is also mentioned in other accounts of Thangbrand's missionary activities so—if it happened—it ought to have occurred in the last few years of the 10th century.[28] The trolls and giantesses mentioned in Vetrliði's verse are known from other sources. Leikn is mentioned in several places in kennings.[29] Gjálp, probably the daughter of Geirrǫðr, is also mentioned in kennings as well as in *Snorra-Edda*'s account of Thór's dealing with her.[30] Þrívaldi was a nine-headed troll men-

[24] Eldjárn 1974, 111: "Á hinn bóginn mun mega treysta því að fornmenn hafi haft sérstaka samkomustaði til trúariðkana og nefnt þá hof".

[25] Foote and Wilson 1970, 398. See above Ch. III.1 and note 1.

[26] Skj. B 1, 127. A 1, 135. See further *Snorra-Edda* 1931, 97.

[27] ÍF I, 348 and note 4. About Thangbrandr see Ch. VI ff. below.

[28] ASB 11, 24 f. *Ól.Tr.m.* 1961, 157. ÍF XII, 260 f. Hkr. 1, 389. See further Almqvist 1974, 59 f. and references.

[29] LP 1966, 367. Ljungberg 1947, 198 f.

[30] LP 1966, 186. *Snorra-Edda* 1931, 106 f. Ljungberg 1947, 198 f.

tioned in kennings of the most ancient poets,[31] and Starkaðr was a famous warrior, in some guieses an eight-armed troll, mentioned e.g. in the Sagas of Hervǫr and Gautrekr.[32]

Another poet probably from the same period, Þorbjǫrn Dísarskáld, praises Thór in the following verses:

Þórr hefr Yggs með órum
Ásgarð of þrek varðan.

Ball í Keilu kolli,
Kjallandi brauzt alla,
áðr drapt Lút ok Leiða,
lézt dreyra Búseyru,
heptuð Hengjankjǫptu.
Hyrrokkin dó fyrri,
þó var snemr en sáma
Svívǫr numin lífi.[33]

(Thór has defended Ásgarð well with the help of Ygg's (Óðin's) men. — Keila's head was broken, you smashed the body of Kjallandi, before that you killed Lút and Leiði and let blood flow from Búseyra, you stopped Hengjankjapta, Hyrrokkin died before that, and earlier still the black Svívǫr was killed.)

The trolls and giantesses in Þorbjǫrn's verses are not as well known from other sources as the ones in Vetrliði's verse. Kjallandi and Hyrrokkin are to be found in other sources and a Hengikepta, who is mentioned in a string of verses, is possibly the same as Hengjankjapta.[34] The enumeration of this rabble caused the verses to be preserved from the time they were composed until Snorri Sturluson recorded them. Their form has led scholars to conclude that they were recited as part of pagan ceremony.[35] In that connection it is said that the verses recount ancient deeds of Thór and that when he is addressed in the 2nd person it involves a prayer that he should pull his weight again as of yore.[36] The fact that such verses were composed in Iceland just before the acceptance of Christianity makes it evident that the worship of Thór was alive and sincere in Iceland at that time.

When the preaching of Christianity began to make its impact in Iceland, Thór seems especially to have been invoked in defence of heathendom. This shows his position among the pagan gods in the last decades of heathendom. The verses of Steinunn, mother of Skáldrefr, for example, are aimed directly at the preaching of the missionary Thangbrandr:

[31] LP 1966, 647. Ljungberg 1947, 198 f.
[32] FAS I, 309 f. FAS III, 12. Almqvist 1974, 82, note 68 and references.
[33] Skj. B 1, 135. A 1, 144.
[34] LP 1966, 243; 306; 339. Ljungberg 1947, 198 f.
[35] Almqvist 1974, 82 f. and references. Ljungberg 1947, 198 f. See further Turville-Petre 1964, 86.
[36] Almqvist 1974, 82 f. and references.

Þórr brá Þvinnils dýri
Þangbrands ór stað lǫngu,
hristi búss ok beysti
barðs ok laust við jǫrðu;
munat skíð of sæ síðan
sundfært Atals grundar,
hregg þvít hart tók leggja
hǫnum kent í spǫnu.[37]

(Thór moved Thangbrand's ship from its place; he shook it and smashed it and struck it against the land; the ship will not after that be fit to sail, for the storm which he (Thór) is said to have made, broke it to splinters.)

In another stanza by Steinunn it says:

Braut fyr bjǫllu gæti
(bǫnd rǫku Val Strandar)
mǫgfellandi mellu
mǫstalls vísund allan;
hlífðit Kristr, þás kneyfði
knǫrr, malmfeta varrar;
lítt hykk at goð gætti
Gylfa hreins at einu.[38]

(The slayer of the son of the giantess (Thór) wrecked the ship of the keeper of the bell (Thangbrandr); the gods moved the ship. Christ was unable to protect the ship from disaster; he (*goð*) did not look after it properly.)

In these verses of Steinunn we clearly see what opinion she and kindred spirits had of Thór's power in the last days of Icelandic paganism. There is no important divergence in interpretation of these verses nor is there any reason to assume they are not correctly dated.[39] They are therefore contemporary evidence of strong belief in a powerful god.

In *Eyrbyggja saga* much is said of the Thór-worship of Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi. He sought the counsel of Thór before he went to Iceland and took with him most of the timber from the temple in Norway (Ch. II.3). The temple of Þórólfr was described earlier (Ch. III), but about the "thing" which he established it says: *Þar sem Þórr hafði á land komit, á tanganum nessins, lét hann hafa dóma alla ok setti þar heraðsþing; þar var svá mikill helgistaðr, at hann vildi með engu móti láta saurga vǫllinn, hvárki í heiptarblóði, ok eigi skyldi þar álfrek ganga.*[40] (In that place where Thór had come to land, on the point of the headland, he had all courts held and established there an assembly for the district; it was such a sacred place that he would not on any account let the ground be defiled by any bloodshed, and there should be no excrement.)

[37] Skj. B 1, 127. A 1, 135.
[38] Skj. B 1, 128. A 1, 136.
[39] Almqvist 1974, 22 note 23 and references.
[40] ÍF IV, 7 f.; 10.

The author of *Eyrbyggja saga* clearly had great interest in old lore and his account of heathen customs is considered very reliable.[41] Einar Ól. Sveinsson's conjecture that many of these old memories survived in oral traditions in the district concerned is not improbable, and the author of the saga was thoroughly acquainted with these localities.[42] The inviolability of the assembly at Þórsnes, here referred to, is also suggested by the stories about the profanation of the thing-place and the change of assembly site.[43] This can be considered a good authority for the close connection of religious observance and local government in heathen times.

Thór's stone is named in *Eyrbyggja saga* with these words: *Þar sér enn dómhring þann, er menn váru dœmdir í til blóts; í þeim hring stendr Þórs steinn, er þeir menn váru brotnir um, er til blóta váru hafðir, ok sér enn blóðslitinn á steininum.*[44] (There is still to be seen the judgement ring where men were sentenced to sacrifice; in this circle stands Thór's stone, on which the backs of men used for sacrifice were broken; and the colour of the blood can still be seen on the stone.) What it says about the colour of the blood on the stone in the 13th century cannot of course be taken seriously. Obviously we are here dealing with an etiological account and it is worth while to note that to this day there is a red stone called Thórs-stone to be seen at the farm Þingvellir not far from the thing-place.[45]

In *Landnámabók*, S and H, the Thór-worship of Hallsteinn, the son of Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi, is described: *Hann blótaði þar til þess, at Þórr sendi honum qndvegissúlur, ok gaf þar til son sinn. Eptir þat kom tré á land hans, þat var sextigi ok þriggja álna ok tveggja faðma digrt; þat var haft til qndvegissúlna, ok eru þar af gǫrvar qndvegissúlur nær á hverjum bœ um þverfjǫrðuna.*[46] (He offered sacrifice to the end that Thór should send him high-seat pillars and gave his son for this. After that a tree came to his shore sixty-three ells long and twelve or fourteen feet thick; it was used for pillars, and there are pillars made from it in nearly every farm on the side fjords.)

Here is clear evidence of Thór's close ties with the high-seat pillars. As related above (Ch. II.3), his effigy was on the pillars of Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi and these he pushed ashore, while here he provides high-seat pillars for a whole district. It appears that Thór's role was supporting

[41] Turville-Petre 1964, 87. Strömbäck 1975, 42.
[42] Sveinsson in ÍF IV, XXIV f.
[43] ÍF IV, 15 ff.; 18.
[44] ÍF IV, 18.
[45] ÍF IV, 18 note 3. ÍF I, 126 note 2 and references. I visited the thing-place on the 17th of August 1974 and was led to the Thórs-stone. The farmer at Þingvellir informed me that near the year 1960 the earth around the stone had been plowed and a great quantity of stones had been unearthed which he assumed could originally have been part of the judgement ring.
[46] ÍF IV, 163 f.

houses and temples in the same way as he supported the world.[47] What the words 'gave his son for this' denote is not clear.[48]

The old giving of names, place-names and personal names, points to the fact that Thór was the god most worshipped in Iceland. In *Landnámabók* 40 different personal names derived from Thór's name are found, and individuals with these names number almost a thousand. About twenty place-names, spread evenly over the country, are derived from Thór's name. Þórshǫfn appears six times, Þórsnes five times, and in addition there are names such as Þórsmǫrk, Þórsá, Þórseyri.[49]

Some of the poems about the gods which place Thór in the seat of honour are probably from the above discussed period. *Lokasenna* is believed to have been composed in Iceland in the latter half of the 10th century, and in that poem it says, when Loki addresses Thór:

Kvað ek fyr ásom,
kvað ek fyr ása sonom,
þaz mik hvatti hugr,
en fyr þér einom
mun ek út ganga,
þvíat ek veit at þú vegr.[50]

("I spoke to the Æsir and to the sons of the Æsir what my mind led me to say, but for you alone will I go away, because I know that you kill.")

This tends to the same conclusion about the position of Thór among the gods as do the poetical and historical sources. He seems to have been, without dispute, the most worshipped god in Iceland of old, and retained that position until the end of the heathen period.

3. The worship of Freyr

Evidence of Freyr-worship in Iceland is not as varied and as indubitable as that of Thór-worship. Still two farms contain his name, Freyshólar and Freysnes, and the latter is also the name of an unhabited headland.[51] Three Icelandic *goðar* bore the eke-name, Freys-goði. One of them, Þórðr Össurarson, is not known apart from his name which appears in reliable sources, including *Landnámabók*, where his descendants are called Freysgyðlingar.[52] On the other hand, the accounts dealing with the other two Freys*goðar*, Þorgrímr and Hrafnkell, are more detailed, though they are not called Freysgoði in the most trustworthy sources.[53]

[47] Turville-Petre 1964, 87.
[48] Aðalsteinsson 1971, 32 ff. and notes 14–16 and references.
[49] Lárusson 1942, 78. See further Turville-Petre 1964, 86 and above Ch. I.4 note 25.
[50] *Eddadigte* II, 56. Nordal 1942, 203. Helgason 1953, 35 f. Sveinsson 1962, 317 ff.
[51] Lárusson 1942, 79.
[52] ÍF I, 320 f.; 336;397.
[53] ÍF I, 516; 472. ÍF IV, 57 ff. ÍF XI, 99 ff. Turville-Petre 1964, 165 ff.

The cult of Freyr is most fully revealed in *Víga-Glúms saga* which was probably written between the years 1220 and 1230.[54] The author was closely acquainted with the locality of the saga and appears to a large degree to have sought his material in local tales which circulated among people there in comparatively fixed form. *Víga-Glúms saga* may therefore be counted among the older and more trustworthy *Íslendingasögur*.[55] This of course does not mean that the saga is therefore reliable evidence of paganism, but it may contain legends which throw some light on religious beliefs 200 years earlier.

One main theme of the saga is the struggle between Víga-Glúmr and Þorkell the Tall. The latter had taken over Þverá, but Glúmr succeded in driving him away, but certainly not without consequences: *Ok áðr Þorkell fór á brott frá Þverá, þá gekk hann til hofs Freys ok leiddi þagat uxa gamlan ok mælti svá: "Freyr", sagði hann, "er lengi hefir fulltrúi minn verit, ok margar gjafir at mér þegit ok vel launat, nú gef ek þér uxa þenna til þess, at Glúmr fari eigi ónauðgari af* Þverárlandi *en ek fer nú. Ok láttu sjá nǫkkurar jartegnir, hvártu þiggr eða eigi." En uxanum brá svá við, at hann kvað við ok fell niðr dauðr.*[56] (And before Þorkell left Þverá, he went to Freyr's temple and led there a full-grown ox, and spoke thus: "Freyr", he said, "who have long been my patron and received many gifts from me and well repaid them, I now give you this ox so that you will bring it about that Glúmr leaves Þverá as unwillingly as I do now. And let me see some sign whether or not you accept this gift". At that the ox bellowed and fell down dead.)

In *Víga-Glúms saga* this account serves the purpose of explaining why Glúmr was forced to leave Þverá. The question whether the same relation between cause and effect existed when Freyr was still being worshipped, i.e. whether this story contains historical kernel, must be left unanswered. This is possible and it may be noted that the religious behaviour evidenced here does not represent Christian behaviour as the author might have known it from his own experience or from books. On the contrary, the behaviour corresponds quite well with the sacrificial rites of Norsemen in the 10th century described by Ibn Fadlān.[57]

Freyr's authority at Þverá is made clear in the passage relating to Vigfús, Glúm's son, who had been sentenced for manslaughter and could not stay at home because of the holiness of the place: *En því skyldu eigi sekir menn þar vera, at Freyr leyfði eigi, er hof þat átti, er þar var.*[58] (But the reason

[54] Kristjánsson in KL XX 1976, 9 f. and references.
[55] Kristjánsson in ÍF IX, XXIX. Turville Petre in *Víga-Glúms saga* 1940, XXII.
[56] *Víga-Glúms saga* 1940, 17.
[57] Birkeland 1954, 20. See further above Ch. II.2 note 24 and Turville-Petre 1964, 251 f.
[58] *Víga-Glúms saga* 1940, 33.

why outlaws should not be there was that Freyr, who owned the temple that was there, would not permit it.) It is difficult to assess how reliable these words are but they may contain a legend of Freyr-sanctity at Þverá and its neighbourhood.[59] In that connection we may mention the cornfield Vitazgjafi (the certain giver), close to the temple which was probably hallowed to Freyr.[60]

Þorgrimr Freysgoði was the grandson of Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi. He figures especially in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* which is considered to have been written just after 1240.[61] Some historical facts probably form the basis of *Gísla saga*, and it is believed to have derived much from oral accounts.[62] Þorgrimr had sacrificed to Freyr according to the saga and shortly after that he was killed. Then it says: *aldri festi snæ útan ok sunnan á haugi Þorgríms ok eigi fraus; ok gátu menn þess til, at hann myndi Frey svá ávarðr fyrir blótin, at hann myndi eigi vilja at frøri á milli þeira.*[63] (Snow never stayed on the south-west side of Þorgrím's mound and it did not freeze there; and men explained this by saying that he must have been so favoured by Freyr for his sacrifices that the god was unwilling to let frost come between them.)

Neither *Víga-Glúms saga* nor *Gísla saga Súrssonar* can be accepted as reliable evidence. One has to judge each particular on the basis of how likely the text is to be based on oral tradition or books or pure invention. Nevertheless it is not improbable that these sagas contain some historical kernel.

Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða is now generally believed to have been written late in the 13th century. Various scholars once thought that the saga was written earlier and that it had great historical value. This view was discarded by Sigurður Nordal who put forward the view that the saga is a comparatively young imaginative work.[64] Hrafnkell is named in several sources, but called Freysgoði only in *Hrafnkels saga*. Therefore it has been put forward that it is not certain that the ardent worshipper of Freyr described in the saga is the historical Hrafnkell.[65] Nevertheless some scholars think that the religious motives in the saga are based on old tradition.[66] This latter view is strengthened in a new study by Óskar Halldórsson.[67]

[59] Kristjánsson in ÍF IX, 66. Turville-Petre 1964, 165 f.
[60] Turville-Petre 1964, 165 and note 4.
[61] Sigfússon in KL V 1960, 326 f. and references.
[62] Þórólfsson in ÍF VI, XXII.
[63] ÍF VI,57 f.
[64] Nordal 1940, 66 ff. Sigfússon in KL VII 1962, 16 and references.
[65] Turville-Petre 1964, 167.
[66] Turville-Petre 1964, 167. Liestøl, K. 1946, 94 ff. Liestøl, A. 1945, 59 ff. Scovazzi 1960, 271 ff.; 288 ff.
[67] Halldórsson 1976, 11 ff.

4. Njǫrðr

In the abovementioned "law-oath" (Ch. III.1 ff.), it says: "*hjálpi mér svá Freyr ok Njǫrðr...*" (so help me Freyr and Njǫrðr...). Njǫrðr is here named next to Freyr but otherwise there are no direct sources to show that he was worshipped in Iceland. In *Snorra-Edda* and the Eddaic poems Njǫrðr is depicted as a ruler of shrines and temples and the god of the sea, winds and sea-voyages.[68] Njarðvík contains his name, and three places on the Icelandic coast are called this.[69] In the naming of these it seems that men had in mind Njǫrðr's capacity for ruling over winds and sea-journeys.

5. Óðinn

Neither in *Landnámabók* nor in the *Íslendingasögur* is it directly mentioned that Óðinn received offerings in Iceland or that sacrifice was made to him.[70] There is on the other hand valid evidence for regarding some of the old poets as followers of Óðinn. Sigurður Nordal has argued that Egill Skalla-Grímsson must have been brought up with faith in Thór and Freyr, but when he became a court poet and made the acquaintance of kings and earls, he turned from his fathers' gods and put his trust in the god of kings and poets.[71]

Áttak gótt
við geirs dróttin,
gerðumk tryggr
at trúa hǫnum.[72]

(I was on good terms with the lord of the spear and made myself confident in trust of him), says Egill when he makes his reckoning with Óðinn in *Sonatorrek*. These words testify to sincere religious belief.

Speaking of the Óðinn-worship of Egill Sigurður Nordal says: "But most of all he worships Óðinn when he intends to make his last trip to the General Assembly with the silver from Aðalsteinn which he had never parted with and had held on to tightest from his father." He then refers to the account in *Egils saga* and adds: "He wishes his money to be *rógmálmur skatna*, he wants to incite men against each other following Óðinn's example, once more to provide the god with men even though he himself was unable to kill."[73]

In *Landnámabók*, S and H, it is related how Helgi trausti killed

[68] *Snorra-Edda* 1931, 30. *Eddadigte* II, 7; 15.
[69] Lárusson 1942, 79. Briem 1945, 52 f.
[70] Turville-Petre 1958, 10 ff. and references.
[71] Nordal 1944, 122.
[72] ÍF II, 255.
[73] Nordal 1944, 126 f.

Þorgrímr, with quotation of the following verse:

Ásmóðar gaf ek Óðni
arfa þróttardjarfan,
guldum gálgavaldi
Gauts tafn, en ná hrafni.[74]

(I gave the brave son of Þormóðr to Óðinn, we brought an Óðinn-offer to the lord of the gallows, but a dead body to the raven.)

Here the author of the verse clearly says that he gave his enemy to Óðinn and in that connection he speaks of an Óðinn-offer (*Gauts tafn*). This does not, however, prove that Helgi trausti was an Óðinn-believer; he could have used these expressions as poetic expressions and kennings merely to illustrate the fact that he killed Þorgrímr. On the other hand, it is plausible that originally these phrases actually had a religious meaning.

Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld (trouble poet) describes the poet's attitude to Óðinn, the god of poetry, in a verse, composed after he had been baptised:

Qll hefr ætt til hylli
Óðins skipat ljóðum,
algilda mank, aldar
iðju várra niðja,
en trauðr, þvít vel Viðris
vald hugnaðisk skaldi,
legg ek á frumver Friggjar
fjón, þvít Kristi þjónum.[75]

(The whole generation of mankind has made poems for Óðin's favour; I remember the all-worthy occupation of our forefathers, but it is with reluctance that I treat the first husband of Frigg with hostility because we serve Christ, for the rule of Viðrir suited the poet well.)[76]

Bo Almqvist is probably right in pointing out that paganism was a more sensitive subject among the poets than the rest of the population[77] and this may explain why they fought so vigorously when their religion was threatened. Hallfreð's verse above, clearly shows the attitude of the poet to the god of poetry after his conversion to Christianity. This among other factors shows the place Óðinn occupied in the minds of poets in Iceland, even though there is no definite proof of his worship there.

[74] ÍF I, 378.
[75] Skj. B 1, 158. A 1, 168.
[76] Foote's translation in Strömbäck 1975, 52.
[77] Almqvist 1974, 81.

Résumé

It cannot be considered conclusively proven that pagan temples were erected in Iceland, in spite of strong evidence to that effect, e.g. the words of Ari the Wise, habitation names and topographical names. A definite answer to that question will have to wait till further evidence has been unearthed.

There is a good case for believing that the pagan legal oath was formulated in the 10th century, the age of syncretism. "*Áss hinn almáttki*" (the almighty god) mentioned in it is probably Thór.

Old poetry, other written sources and the bestowal of names reveal unmistakeably that Thór was the god most worshipped in Iceland in heathen times. Fragments of poems composed in pagan times show strong and sincere individual worship of this god.

There are also reliable sources about worship offered to Freyr, placenames and eke-names together with stories that probably contain some historical kernel.

Óðinn is often named in old Icelandic sources, especially in poetry where he has many names. There is no evidence of his worship in Iceland even though some of the pagan poets may be considered his trusty followers. Óðinn kept the undiminished respect of some of these poets even after they had been converted to Christianity.

IV. Fate and personal destinies

1. Fate of man

In Old Norse texts destiny has various names, all of which convey the same sense or approximately so: *ørlǫg, skǫp, mjǫtuðr, forlǫg, auðna.*[1] In *Vǫluspá*, which according to Sigurður Nordal was composed in Iceland in the last part of the tenth century,[2] it is told that the norns ruled over fate. Their abode was at the roots of the ash Yggdrasill, the world tree. They were three in number, Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld,[3] and they determined men's fates and predestined the length of their lives, as it says in the poem:

Þær lǫg lǫgðo,
þær líf kuro
alda bǫrnom,
ørlǫg seggia.[4]

(They established laws, allotted life to the sons of men, destinies of men.)

As a trinity, Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld, are in all likelihood not very old. Verðandi is not mentioned except in *Vǫluspá*, whereas Skuld is named elsewhere as one of the valkyries.[5] Urðr, who appears under corresponding names in Old English sources, is however, without doubt the power of destiny in which ancient people generally believed. The name Urðr is related to the verb *verða*, to become, happen.

In *Snorra-Edda* and the Eddaic poems it is told that the norns were present at men's birth and determined their destinies as they wound the threads of fate which are called *ørlǫgþættir* in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*[6] and *ørlǫgsímu* in *Reginsmál*.[7] In *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* we are told that kings have no defence against fate (*vinnat skjǫldungar skǫpum*)[8] and *Grípisspá* says: *munat skǫpum vinna*[9] (one cannot escape one's destiny).

One cannot be absolutely certain that the fatalism which appears in these heroic verses existed in heathendom. The poems just mentioned are not all

[1] De Vries I 1956, 267 ff. Ström, F. 1961, 141. Ström, Å. 1967, 65 ff.
[2] Nordal 1942, 203. Helgason 1953, 38 ff.
[3] *Eddadigte* I 1962, 5 f.
[4] *Eddadigte* I 1962, 6.
[5] *Snorra-Edda* 1931, 23.
[6] *Eddadigte* III 1961, 9.
[7] *Eddadigte* III 1961, 57.
[8] *Eddadigte* III 1961, 36.
[9] *Eddadigte* III 1961, 52.

of Icelandic origin but are first found in their present form in Icelandic sources from some time after the conversion to Christianity.[10] Some longer or shorter existence in oral form must be presupposed for them. On the other hand, in an essay on Ynglingatal 10 and Norse belief in fate, Dag Strömbäck has shown how belief in fate impregnates one of the oldest Norwegian poem, Ynglingatal, from the late ninth century.[11]

In poems of Icelandic origin we also meet a belief in fate. Thus Kormákr says: *máat vinna skǫpum Hildar hreggmiðjunga*[12] (one cannot oppose the fate of mankind) and in another place when he cannot sleep with Steingerðr: *valda skǫp ... rík*[13] (powerful fate is the cause).

The poet Kormákr is said to have lived about the middle of the tenth century.[14] In his introduction to *Kormáks saga* in *Íslenzk fornrit* Einar Ól. Sveinsson finds it most probable that the best part of the verses that Kormákr is said to have composed were composed by him, among them the verses here referred to.[15] Bjarni Einarsson on the other hand in his work *Skáldasögur* has argued that the verses in *Kormáks saga* are not independent source material but part of the narrative.[16] He finds many examples of influence from foreign 12th and 13th century poetry on the verses in *Kormáks saga*.[17] In Saga-Book of Viking Society Einar Ól. Sveinsson has opposed Bjarni Einarsson and maintains that his arguments do not show any links between *Kormáks saga* and the French poems nor between the verses in the saga and the troubadour poetry of the south.[18] The question must therefore be left open whether the verses quoted above are source material on pagan times or from the 13th century. I find the evidence rather point to the view that they were composed by Kormákr.

In the *Íslendingasögur* destiny is a prominent theme. In *Vatnsdœla saga* the hopeless struggle of Ingimundr the Old against his destiny is related in clear terms (see above Ch. II.2 and note 10). Grímr, Ingimund's foster-brother, on the other hand sensibly acquisced: *Grímr kvazk hyggja at eigi mundi tjóa at brjótask við forlǫgunum.* (Grímr said he thought it was useless to struggle against fate.) Later Grímr comments that he would not be surprised if Ingimundr came to Iceland, *því at óhægt mun forlǫgin at*

[10] Anne Holtsmark in KL VI 1961, 412 ff. and references.

[11] Strömbäck 1959, 386 ff. (= Strömbäck 1970, 201 ff.). See further Ström 1967, 70 f.

[12] Skj. B 1, 77. A 1, 85. Sveinsson in ÍF VIII, 245 reads: *skǫp of vinna skeggju hreggmiðjunga* (fate defeats the soldier).

[13] Skj. B 1, 79. A 1, 87. Sveinsson in ÍF VIII 272 reads: *valda rík skǫp sínu* (powerful fate causes this?).

[14] ÍF VIII, CIII.

[15] Sveinsson in ÍF VIII, LXXX ff.

[16] Einarsson 1961, 101. See further Einarsson in KL IX, 1964, 142 ff.

[17] Einarsson 1961, 131; 162 ff.

[18] Sveinsson 1966, 25.

flýja (for it is not easy to escape one's destiny). When Ingimundr finally accepted the decision to go to Iceland, he states that he does so, *meir af forlǫgum ok atkvæði rammra hluta en af fýsi* (more from destiny and the decree of mighty powers than from desire). And when it is said that it is a pity that such a man leaves Norway, the words are added: *en þó er fátt skǫpum ríkara*[19] (but few things are more powerful than fate).

The idea that it was useless to try to influence destiny is given wide expression in the Sagas. *Gísla saga* tells of an attempt to prevent a breach of friendship, which had been prophesied, between Vésteinn, Gísli, Þorkell and Þorgrimr. When the attempt failed, Gísli said: "... *get ek ok, at auðna ráði nú um þetta.*"[20] (... and I believe that fate will now decide this matter.) In *Víga-Glúms saga* Vigfús, a chieftain in Norway, says when there is a discussion about whether his daughter would be married to an Icelander: "*Þetta mun vera forlǫg hennar, þótt til væri ætlat eigi óframar um frændkonu vára*". (That will be her fate though we had intended for our kinswoman no less a lot.) It is said that Vigfús spoke similar words about the son of his daughter: *Vigfúss kvezk ætla þat forlǫg Glúms, at auka ætt sína ok sóma á Íslandi.*[21] (Vigfús said he thought it would be the destiny of Glúmr that he add to his family and honour in Iceland.)

These quotations from the Icelandic Sagas show that in the 13th century, when they were written (see Ch. I.2), belief in fate was right and proper. The references to fate in these texts are, it is true, put in the mouths of people living before the acceptance of Christianity, but scholars no longer accept the opinion that the sagas were preserved little altered from the time the events described are said to have occurred until the time of writing.[22] We can agree with Baetke that these remarks on fate were put into the mouths of the saga persons by their authors.[23] The opinion that the fatalism expressed in the Icelandic Sagas was rooted in the contemporary attitudes of the authors receives support from *Sturlunga saga*. This book, written or compiled around the year 1300 mostly about people and events from the 12th and 13th centuries,[24] contains an account of a woman saying: "... *allt man ætlat fyrir...*" (everything is predistined). Another woman answers her: "... *þat er ákveðit, er minna háttar er en forlǫg manna.*" (even lesser things than the destinies of men are predetermined.) And later in the story one of these women says: "*En þat mun verða um forlǫg okkar, sem áðr er fyrir*

[19] ÍF VIII, 30 ff.; 36.
[20] ÍF VI, 24.
[21] *Víga-Glúms saga* 1940, 7; 11.
[22] Sveinsson in KL VII 1962, 496 ff. and references. See further Ch. I.2 above and notes 16–21.
[23] Baetke 1973, 345.
[24] Benediktsson in KL XVII 1972, 355 ff. and references.

ætlat."[25] (But our fate will be as has been decided.) Here the women express exactly the same attitude to fate as traced above in the Icelandic Sagas. It may be added that the woman last quoted was the mother of Earl Gizurr who was borne in the first decade of the 13th century.[26] The words are in the socalled *Haukdæla þáttr* in *Sturlunga saga* which is from around 1300 and composed by an unknown author.[27]

In his essay Scandinavian Belief in Fate Åke V. Ström says i.a.: "Christianity does not give room for any belief in fate."[28] Ström divides his essay into two main sections which he calls "Pre-Christian Belief in Fate" and "Post-Christian Belief in Fate". In the former he draws upon examples from old texts, from the oldest poetry to the Icelandic Sagas of the 13th century, all of which he considers Pre-Christian sources. Post-Christian sources, according to Ström, are various superstitious examples of fatalism from the secularised 20th century.[29]

Ström is of course right, when he maintains that doctrinally there is no room for fatalism in Christianity. Yet reality is not always in accordance with theory. This seems to have applied to 13th-century Iceland as far as rampant fatalism in a Christian country was concerned. As Ström in fact points out this could be partly due to the fact that the old Scandinavians did not make any strong distinction between theism and fatalism.[30] But, as has already been pointed out, it is absurd to regard fatalism in the Icelandic Sagas and other 13th-century sources as evidence of a pre-Christian phenomenon. It cannot be rejected that the fatalism reflected in 13th century literature may have its roots in pagan fatalism as evidenced in the earliest poems such as Ynglingatal. But we cannot decide whether in any particular instance it is a genuine live from paganism or whether it depends on an author's acquaintance with literature, where such fatalism may be a stock motif.

2. Fate and the pagan gods

In *Vǫluspá* it says:

Ek sá Baldri,
blóðgom tívor,
Óðins barni,
ørlǫg fólgin.[31]

[25] *Sturlunga saga* I 1906, 249 f.
[26] *Sturlunga saga* II 1911, 188 ff. *Sturlunga saga* II 1946, lvii.
[27] *Sturlunga saga* II 1911, 188. Jóhannesson in *Sturlunga saga* II 1946, xxv f. and references.
[28] Ström 1967, 63 and notes 1–3 and references.
[29] Ström 1967, 65 ff.; 78 ff.
[30] Ström 1967, 77.
[31] *Eddadigte* I, 8.

(I saw fate in store for Baldr, Óðin's son, the blood-stained god.)

The same poem also tells how other gods met with their fates. Óðinn became the victim of Fenrisúlfr, Thór of the Miðgarð Serpent.[32]

The old Nordic concept of fate thus resembled a blind law, superior to god and man, that could at any time impose itself on their lives. The main difference in the position of gods and men seems to have been that it was clearer to the gods than to men what fate bore in its lap. In *Lokasenna* Óðinn says about Gefjun:

> *Því at aldar ørlǫg*
> *hygg ek at hón ǫll um viti*
> *iafngǫrla sem ek.*[33]

(Because I think that she knows as well as myself all the fates of men.)

As will be mentioned more fully later (Ch. IV.3 below), Óðinn was the foremost of all gods and men by virtue of the fact that he could see forward into time, prophesy his fate and that of others. According to the words of Freyja in *Lokasenna* Frigg also had foreknowledge:

> *ørlǫg Frigg*
> *hygg ek at ǫll viti,*
> *þótt hón sialfgi segi.*[34]

(I think Frigg knows all the fates though she tells them not.)

As mentioned earlier (above Ch. III.2), *Lokasenna* is believed to have been composed in the latter half of the 10th century. The verses from the poem quoted here make the clear point that it was thought important for a god to know his own fate and the fates of men. This knowledge the gods transmitted to men in response to sacrifice.[35] Significant parts of the sacrificial ceremony were doubtless that a man learned about the future, was able to enquire of the gods what could be expected in the future and so arrange his actions accordingly. In this way it was sometimes easy to prevent danger and similarly to obtain the best luck possible.

3. How destinies could be foretold

In Norse heathen practices it must have been very common for men to seek to learn their fates by casting lots together with sacrifice to the gods.[36] But this was not the only method which was used to ascertain the future and men's fates. Men tried also other methods which were in their nature more

[32] *Eddadigte* I, 12 f.
[33] *Eddadigte* II, 50.
[34] *Eddadigte* II, 51.
[35] de Vries I 1956, 416 f.; 434 ff. Meissner 1917, 8.
[36] de Vries I 1956, 434 f. and references.

dependent on magic, and demanded distinct spiritual accomplishment. One such method was *seiðr*, which is described thus in *Heimskringla: Óðinn kunni þá íþrótt, svá at mestr máttr fylgdi, ok framði sjálfr, er seiðr heitir, en af því mátti hann vita ørlǫg manna ok óorðna hluti.*[37] (Óðinn knew that art which carried with it the greatest power and practised it himself; it is called *seiðr*. By it he could know men's fates and things of the future.)

In *Heimskringla* we are also told that Freyja was the first to teach *seiðr* among the Æsir, but such activity is said to have been common among Vanir.[38] Of course we cannot rely much on as recent a source as *Heimskringla* from the first half of the 13th century.[39] It is however noteworthy that the pagan gods are connected with *seiðr*, the magic used to foretell the destinies of men and future events. In the most explicit Icelandic source on *seiðr, Eiríks saga rauða*, the pagan gods are not mentioned in connection with this activity, but it is considered so pagan that a Christian left the farm while this magic was being performed.[40] Still the aim of the *seiðr* in *Eiríks saga rauða* was the same as when carried out by Óðinn, for on its conclusion Þorbjǫrg lítilvǫlva (small sibyl) said to her female assistant: "... *þín forlǫg eru mér nú allglǫggsæ*"[41] (now I see your future destinies quite clearly). Related to *seiðr* is the kind of prophesying achieved by *útiseta*.[42]

In *Orkneyinga saga* it is related how a Swedish sorcerer sought to foresee the destiny of Hákon Pálsson. When he took it upon him to find out Hákon's fate, he told him to come back after three nights: *var hann þá í húsi nokkru einn saman, ok varpaði mœðilega ǫndinni, er hann gekk inn; strauk hendinni um ennit, sagði, at hann hefði miklu til kostat, áðr hann yrði þeirra hluta vís, er hann skyldi forvitnask. Hákon kvesk þá heyra vilja sín forlǫg.*[43] (He was now in a house all alone, and he drew his breath heavily when Hákon entered. He wiped his forehead with his hand and said it had cost him much pain before he got the knowledge of the things he was supposed to find out about. Hákon then said he would like to hear his destiny.) As Dag Strömbäck has pointed out this method of prophecy is very like *seiðr*, it has similar characteristics of wizardy, it makes similar stern demands on the skill and stamina of the person who performs it.[44]

Orkneyinga saga is thought to have been written in the second half of the

[37] *Heimskringla* 1911, 8. See further Strömbäck 1935, 33 and note 2 and references.
[38] *Heimskringla* 1911, 6. Strömbäck 1935, 33 note 1.
[39] Lie in KL VI 1961, 299 ff. and references.
[40] ÍF IV, 209.
[41] ÍF IV, 208.
[42] Strömbäck 1935, 127 ff.
[43] *Orkneyinga saga* 1913–16, 96 f.
[44] Strömbäck 1935, 184 ff.

12th or at the beginning of the 13th century,[45] but *Eiríks saga rauða* in the latter half of the 13th century.[46] The source-value of the texts quoted here must be restricted by their time of writing.

4. Fate and the Christian god

One does not know how old the idea is that the ancient Nordic gods were at the mercy of fate. The poems containing this idea are dated to the latter half of the 10th century (above Ch. III.2 and 4). It is conceivable that this consolation may have arisen in the 10th century during the period of syncretism when the old faith was threathened (above Ch. III.1). Given the conditions at that time the poets may well have felt that the pagan gods had their own destinies. What matters most, however, is not the age of the idea, but the fact that here there appears a qualitative difference between the pagan gods and the god of the Christians. The latter did not allow any superior force, not even fate.[47] This particular attribute of the Christian god was asserted already at the time of the first Christian missions. A piece of verse by Eilífr Guðrúnarson, which is preserved in *Snorra-Edda* and thought to be from the conversion period,[48] says the following about Christ:

> *Setbergs kveða sitja*
> *sunnr at Urðar brunni,*
> *svá hefr ramr konungr remðan*
> *Róms banda sik lǫndum.*[49]

(Rome's mighty king who is said to sit at Urð's well in the south has put on new strength in the lands of the powers of the mountains (the lands of the trolls).)

This half-stanza is difficult and various attempts have been made to interpret it.[50] Here Finnur Jónsson's interpretation is followed which according to my opinion gives the most plausible meaning.[51] It is interesting that Christ is here in the role of Thór as the strong warrior who defeats the trolls and wins land from them. This is an example of the religious syncretism which is supposed to have existed in Iceland in the 10th century.[52]

And in a half-stanza said to be composed by Skapti Þóroddsson the Lawspeaker it says:

[45] Guðmundsson in KL XII 1967, 700 ff. and references.
[46] Jansson in KL III 1958, 536 ff. and references. Strömbäck 1935, 54 ff.
[47] Strömbäck 1975, 58. Ström 1967, 63 and notes 1–3. Paasche 1958, 99 ff.
[48] *Snorra-Edda* 1931, 158. Helgason 1953, 153. Strömbäck 1975, 54.
[49] Skj. B 1, 144. A 1, 152.
[50] Lange 1958, 53–7 and references. Foote in Strömbäck 1975, 54 notes 1–2 and references.
[51] Skj. B 1, 144. Lange 1958, 57.
[52] Strömbäck 1975, 53. Lange 1958, 57. See further above Ch. III.1.

Máttr es munka dróttins
mestr; aflar goð flestu;
Kristr skóp ríkr ok reisti
Róms hǫll verǫld alla.[53]

(The lord of the monks (Christ) is mightiest of all; the god (i.e. Christ) is capable of most; mighty Christ created the whole of the world and built the hall of Rome).

Skapti was Lawspeaker from 1003–30.[54] If the assumption is correct that he composed this verse[55] then it must be considered a reliable source on the way in which the Christian god, Christ, was advocated in the Nordic countries at that time. In this source there is no doubt about Christ's superiority over both the pagan gods and fate. He is said to have created the whole of the world.

Résumé

It is most evident that belief in fate had deep roots in northern heathendom in the ninth century.

In verses presumably from the latter half of the 10th century fate is a distinctive factor. There exists a great many examples to show that it was believed that not only men but also gods were subject to destiny.

In Icelandic sources from the 13th century, the *Íslendingasögur* and *Sturlunga saga*, there are many examples of the popularity of fatalism. Of course it is the authors of the sagas and *Sturlunga saga* who put remarks on fate into the mouths of their persons, but it cannot be decided at this stage whether this attitude was part of the literary heritage the authors inherited or part of the general outlook of the age in which they were written or remnants of ancient pagan culture which was certainly permeated by fatalism.

The Christian god, Christ, had the advantage over the pagan gods that he was superior to fate. This quality of his appears e.g. in a verse from the time of the acceptance of Christianity. This advantage could be useful in the battle that lay ahead.

[53] Skj. B I, 291. A I, 314. *Snorra-Edda* 1931, 158. Lange 1958, 68 f. and references.
[54] ÍF I, 19.
[55] Helgason 1953, 153. Strömbäck 1975, 56.

V. Sources on the acceptance of Christianity in Iceland

1. *Íslendingabók* and Ari the Wise

Ari wrote *Íslendingabók* in the years 1122–33 in two versions of which only the later one is preserved.[1] As Ari says in the preface of this later version, he wrote the work at the request of the bishops of Skálholt and Hólar, and they and Sæmundr the Wise read the work through: *Íslendingabók gørða ek fyrst byskupum órum, Þorláki ok Katli, ok sýndak bæði þeim ok Sæmundi presti.*[2] (I wrote *Íslendingabók* first for our bishops Þorlákr and Ketill and showed it to them and the priest Sæmundr.) This version of *Íslendingabók*, which might have been written about 1130, is preserved in two copies, both based on the same manuscript, now lost, written about 1200. Jón Erlendsson, priest at Villingaholt, made the copies in the middle of the 17th century at the request of Brynjólfur, bishop of Skálholt.[3] There is every indication that Jón Erlendsson transcribed the text of the original work conscientiously and there is no reason to suspect that the original version of Ari's was changed or damaged in transmission. The quotations from *Íslendingabók* which have been taken up in other old writings on the whole correspond well with the text in Jón Erlendsson's copies. It must be safe to agree with Jón Jóhannesson when he states that the *Íslendingabók* we know is little changed or not at all from Ari's later version.[4]

As mentioned earlier, Ari rewrote the first version of his work on the basis of the reading which his learned contemporaries had given it. In the preface he gives an account of his principle: *En hvatki es missagt es í fræðum þessum, þá es skylt at hafa þat heldr, es sannara reynisk.*[5] (But whatever is misstated in this history it is our duty to give preference to what is proved to be more accurate.) These words indicate that above every other consideration Ari wished to preserve the truth and everything suggests that he obtained the most reliable information available to him. In the First

[1] Benediktsson in ÍF I, XVII. Hagnell 1938, 57 ff. Sigfússon 1944, 38 ff. Ellehøj 1965, 35 f.

[2] ÍF I, 3.

[3] Benediktsson in ÍF I, XLIV ff.

[4] Jóhannesson in *Íslenzk handrit I* 1956, V–VII. See further Hagnell 1938, 53; 62. Sigfússon 1944, 21 ff.; 33. Ellehøj 1965, 25 ff.; 62 ff.

[5] ÍF I, 3.

Grammatical Treatise one reads of the *skynsamlegt vit*, the "reasonable understanding", of Ari.[6] In the classical comment about Ari the Wise which Snorri Sturluson wrote in the preface of *Óláfs saga helga*, repeated in the preface of *Heimskringla*, he says that Ari was "of deep understanding" (*forvitri*) and "eager for knowledge" and "had a good memory". Snorri also draws attention to the critical awareness and strong reliability of Ari in judging sources, which is evident for example in his choice of people as authorities: *Því var eigi undarlegt, at Ari væri sannfróðr at fornum tíðendum... at hann hafði numit at gǫmlum mǫnnum ok vitrum.*[7] (It was not strange that Ari should be well-informed about old times... for he had learned from old and wise men.) Ari mentions these men by name in *Íslendingabók* and also gives various important pieces of information about them.

Ari often cites his foster-father and teacher, Teitr, c. 1040—1110. Teit's father was Ísleifr, Iceland's first bishop, who was in turn the son of Gizurr the White, leader of the Christians at the General Assembly in the year 999.[8] On the other hand, the oldest of Ari's authorities was Hallr Þórarinsson, farmer in Haukadalr. He was probably borne in 995 or 996. Ari says of him in *Íslendingabók* and Snorri repeats it from Ari in his prefaces, that he could remember when the missionary Thangbrandr baptized him at the age of three. Snorri goes further to say that Hallr was of "great intellect and good memory".[9] Among his authorities Ari also enumerates Þuríðr Snorradóttir, c. 1025—1112. She was the daughter of Snorri goði to whom some sources allot an important role in the acceptance of Christianity.[10] Ari says that Þuríðr was *margspǫk ok óljúgfróð* (learned in many things and trustworthy), while Snorri says that she remembered her father who, according to Snorri, died in 1131.[11]

In addition to the people just named, Ari cites a number of others who were borne around or before the middle of the 11th century.[12] These people must have spent their early years in the company of many people who had heard about the acceptance of Christianity—how it came to pass—from the lips of eye-witnesses.

On the basis of the knowledge of these informants—and other possible sources—Ari gives a short survey of the main events in Thangbrand's mission, mentioning at the same time other incidents which led to the

[6] The First Grammatical Treatise 1972, 208 f. See further Paasche 1956, 278.
[7] *Heimskringla* 1911, 2 f.
[8] ÍF I, 4; 7; 14 f.; 17 f.; 21; 26.
[9] ÍF I, 21. *Heimskringla* 1911, 2.
[10] ASB 11, 39; 42.
[11] *Heimskringla* 1911, 3. ÍF I, 4.
[12] ÍF I, 4 ff.

Icelanders accepting Christianity.[13] In my opinion Ari had both the desire and the ability to impart true information. What he chose to present must be the basis of the account here. It is important to note, however, that Ari has not deigned to set down everything he knew. His exposition is brief and compact, and he strictly sticks to the main points. When a younger source contains material which does not contradict Ari's account, we must in each instance evaluate its authenticity. The mere fact that specific material is not found in *Íslendingabók* does not prove that it is complete fiction.

But we must not forget, when evaluating Ari's work, that he was a priest and his work was done under the auspices of two bishops. It was read through by both them and the best educated Icelandic ecclesiastic by European standard at that time. It is also probable that Ari's informants, especially Teitr, went into more detail when telling of the role played by their ancestors in the Conversion than of that of others. Ari himself was closely related to Síðu-Hallr (see below Ch. XI.3, note 29), one of the leading figures connected with the Conversion. All this may consciously or unconsciously have influenced Ari's account in *Íslendingabók*. With this reservation *Íslendingabók* is a unique source on the acceptance of Christianity in Iceland and must form the basis of all research into the Conversion. Only when a satisfactory explanation has been found of every item in Ari's account can we look at other sources or put forward suggestions where the sources fail.

2. Theodoricus monachus

Nearest to *Íslendingabók* in age is the Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium by the Norwegian monk Theodoricus. This work was probably written shortly before 1180 and certainly not later than 1187.[14] In it reference is made to the Icelanders as being very trustworthy sources, who retain in memory the material which exists in their old poems.[15] On the other hand it has not been proved that the author used written Icelandic sources.[16]

Some suggestions have been made as to what Icelanders Theodoricus may be referring to. Halvorsen is of the opinion that he is referring to the

[13] ÍF I, 14 ff. A new essay by Sveinbjörn Rafnsson deals with the ties between the sources on missionary activities and presents various interesting new aspects concerning the attitude and assessment of these sources. I only received this essay when my book was about to be printed so its implication for our work could not be dealt with here. (Rafnsson 1977, 19 ff.)

[14] Holtsmark in KL VI 1961, 583 ff. and references. Storm 1880, 3.

[15] Storm 1880, 3.

[16] Holtsmark in KL VI 1961, 584. Aðalbjarnarson 1937, 49 ff. Ellehøj 1965, 175 ff.

court skalds,[17] while Aðalbjarnarson and Johnsen have argued that Theodoricus met Icelandic colleagues of his, i.e. Church people.[18] It is virtually certain that a number of Icelanders were his contemporaries in Niðarós when he wrote his work. There is evidence that Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson was at Niðarós at the same time as Theodoricus and possibly aquainted with him, since they were both close to the Norwegian archbishop.[19]

Theodoricus was writing the history of the kings of Norway, but the activites of Óláfr Tryggvason caused him to describe the missionary work in Iceland and the country's Conversion to Christianity. In evaluating his work we must keep in mind that he must have been affected by the attitudes and conceptions pertaining to his own education and environment.[20]

3. Odd's Ólafssaga

Oddr Snorrason, monk in the monastery at Þingeyri in Iceland wrote the history of Óláfr Tryggvason in Latin about 1190. The original version of this has not been found but two fragments of a translation have been preserved: AM 310, 4to and Sthlm. perg. 4to no. 18.[21] In the latter of these *Íslendingabók* is cited in connection with the Conversion whereas the former actually copies *Íslendingabók*.[22] It has been argued that the compilar, who added the chapter from *Íslendingabók*, may have had access to Ari's older version.[23] If this is correct, the divergence of this account from the younger version of *Íslendingabók* is of increased significance.

Odd's Ólafssaga is not the work of a historian. It is written to extol the missionary king in the fashion of foreign and native legendaries.[24] As Sigurður Nordal has pointed out, this was a step from the critical attitude of Ari to an uncritical history writing in the service of the faith and Church.[25] This we must bear in mind when we evaluate this work as source and the same applies to those that follow. Among the works Oddr is supposed to have used, apart from *Íslendingabók*, is the history of the kings of Norway by Theodoricus mentioned above.[26]

[17] Halvorsen 1958, 142 ff. Nordal 1953, 195 ff.; 199.
[18] Aðalbjarnarson 1937, 74. Johnsen 1939, 22 f.
[19] Johnsen 1939, 23. *Byskupa sögur* I 1953, 53 f.
[20] Hansen 1949, 70 ff. Johnsen 1939, 64 ff.
[21] Halldórsson in KL XII 1967, 551. Aðalbjarnarson 1937, 55 ff.
[22] *Odd's Ólafssaga* 1932, 126 ff.
[23] Turville-Petre 1953, 100. Almqvist 1974, 55 and note 6.
[24] Lönnroth 1963, 55 ff. Halldórsson in KL XII 1967, 551.
[25] Nordal 1953, 201.
[26] Aðalbjarnarson 1937, 73 f. Halldórsson in KL XII 1967, 551.

4. Kristni saga

Kristni saga is considered by many scholars to be the work of Sturla Þórðarson and it has been argued that it forms the sequel to his *Landnámabók*.[27] Earlier scholars thought it was written in the first half of the 13th century, but more recent scholars favour a date after 1250.[28] *Kristni saga* contains an account of the three missions to Iceland, it describes the conversion of the country and traces the history of Christianity to the death of Bishop Gizurr Ísleifsson in 1118. *Íslendingabók* was used as a source, but since much in *Kristni saga* is not found in *Íslendingabók*, scholars have directed their attention to finding other sources.

Björn M. Ólsen argued long ago that the main source of *Kristni saga* was a work about Óláfr Tryggvason and gave various examples of how that work might have been abridged in *Kristni saga*.[29] Later scholars, among them Aðalbjarnarson and Almqvist, have further supported Ólsen's conclusion.[30] This source is assumed to be a lost work on Óláfr Tryggvason, written in Latin by Gunnlaugr Leifsson, a monk in Þingeyri monastery, close to the year 1200. Gunnlaugr is thought to have used the work of his fellow monk Oddr, mentioned above, as a source.[31] In addition to drawing on traditions and popular tales the author of *Kristni saga* is also believed to have used Laxdæla saga, a work probably written before 1245.[32] So the chief sources of *Kristni saga* other than *Íslendingabók* cannot be traced further back than to around the year 1200. And as far as its source-value is concerned *Kristni saga* suffers in the main from the same defects as *Odd's Óláfssaga*, being one more example of uncritical history writing in the service of church and religion, and it must be judged on that basis.[33] The work contains a few verses which have greater source-value than the rest. They will be referred to below (Ch. V.6).

5. Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta

Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta (hereafter abbreviated *Ól.Tr.m.*) is thought to have been compiled soon after the year 1300.[34] Still more than *Kristni saga, Ól.Tr.m.* has characteristics which show that it was compiled

[27] Jóhannesson 1941, 70 f. Nordal 1953, 226 f. Rafnsson 1974, 66 f.

[28] Aðalbjarnarson 1937, 124. Lárusson in KL IX 1964, 365 and references. Almqvist 1974, 27.

[29] Ólsen 1893, 276 ff.; 304 ff.; 309 ff.

[30] Kahle in ASB 11, XII f. Aðalbjarnarson 1937, 85 ff.; 120 ff. Almqvist 1974, 26 ff.

[31] Ólsen 1893, 304 ff. Lárusson in KL IX 1964, 356. Halldórsson in KL XII 1967, 551 ff.

[32] Lárusson in KL IX 1964, 356. Sigfússon in KL X 1965, 368 ff.

[33] Nordal 1953, 201. Strömbäck 1975, 21.

[34] Halldórsson in KL XII 1967, 552.

from other works, and the main sources about the missions and the Conversion used in the two sagas were in close agreement in substance.[35]

The connection between *Kristni saga* and *Ól.Tr.m.* is complicated and has not yet been explained satisfactorily. There are other problems, too, connected with the sources of *Ól.Tr.m.* that await a closer study.[36] Scholars differ for example as to how to interpret the following sentence in one of the *Ól.Tr.m.* manuscripts, the so-called *Bergsbók: Hér byrjar saga Ólafs Kóngs Tryggvasonar er Bergr ábóti snaraði.*[37] (Here begins the story of King Óláfr Tryggvason translated (compiled) by Abbot Bergr.) The opinions differ as to what the verb *snara* means. Both in old and modern Icelandic the verb seems in most cases to have "translate" as its only meaning.[38] Sigurður Nordal concluded that the history of Óláfr Tryggvason by the monk Gunnlaugr was translated into Icelandic early in the 13th century,[39] but Abbot Bergr is last mentioned alive in 1345.[40] If the verb *snara* here means to translate Abbot Bergr might have made a new translation of Gunnlaug's work as Bo Almqvist has suggested.[41] If this is correct it may affect our evaluation of the sources dealt with here. *Kristni saga* would have been based on an older translation of Gunnlaugr, but *Ól.Tr.m.* on the latter translation by Bergr. In that case it is therefore possible that *Ól.Tr.m.* is closer to the original text of Gunnlaugr than *Kristni saga* and thus a more reliable source on certain points.

In his introduction to *Bergsbók* in Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile Lindblad has pointed out that it is every bit as credible that *snara* means "compile" in the abovementioned context.[42] We cannot therefore assume that Bergr made a new translation of Gunnlaug's work.

Ól.Tr.m. is every inch as much a religious tract as *Kristni saga*, the main purpose being to exalt Óláfr Tryggvason, often to the detriment of historical trust.[43] The main sources of *Ól.Tr.m.* other than *Íslendingabók* cannot be traced further back than to about 1200 with any certainty. The work also contains the same verses as *Kristni saga* and traditions which it may prove difficult to evaluate as sources.[44]

[35] Ólsen 1893, 304 ff. Almqvist 1974, 27 ff.
[36] Halldórsson in KL XII 1967, 553. Almqvist 1974, 28; 68.
[37] *Ól.Tr.m.* 1 1958, 1. Ólsen 1893, 200 f. Almqvist 1974, 28; 30 f.
[38] Lindblad 1963, 12 and references. Almqvist 1974, 31.
[39] Nordal 1953, 203.
[40] Halldórsson in KL XII 1967, 552.
[41] Almqvist 1974, 31.
[42] Lindblad 1963, 12 f. and references.
[43] Lönnroth 1963, 60 f. Strömbäck 1975, 22 f.
[44] Halldórsson in KL XII 1967, 551 ff. and references.

6. *Njáls saga's* "Conversion þáttr"

Njáls saga, which is considered written about 1280,[45] contains a chapter describing the missionary work in Iceland and the country's conversion.[46] This chapter, which has been called *Njáls saga*'s "Conversion *þáttr*" resembles in many ways the accounts in *Kristni saga* and *Ól.Tr.m.*; e.g. it contains most of the same verses.[47] But this part of *Njáls saga* also has material specifically connected with the historical background of the novel in the South of Iceland.[48] Björn M. Ólsen maintained that the main source of this *þáttr*, apart from *Íslendingabók* and this particular Southern material, was the abovementioned chapter in the history of Óláfr Tryggvason by Gunnlaugr.[49] Einar Ól. Sveinsson has on the other hand supported the suggestion that a separate "*Kristni þáttr*" existed, probably compiled in the South before *Njáls saga* was written.[50] Sveinsson doubts whether the author of this "*Kristni þáttr*" drew upon the work of Gunnlaugr and he thinks there may be another connection because these accounts are specific on such different points, but he does not make out a further case for this missing link.[51] Sveinsson considers the traditions from the South contained in *Njáls saga* to be of greater value for the historian than the material which might be traced to Gunnlaugr.[52] Bo Almqvist, who has recently studied the connection between these three works, holds that if *Kristni saga* and *Ól.Tr.m.* were based upon the work of Gunnlaugr in their accounts of the Conversion then *Njáls saga* must have been so, too.[53] I find Bo Almqvist's case very plausible. A common source of all three works best explains in my opinion the affinity between them in many aspects, and not least the fact that the verses are almost the same in all three even though the order and framework are not always the same.[54] But there is really no greater divergence between them than may well be caused by original minds when dealing with the same material, each altering it somewhat as they please. The verses themselves do not seem to be distorted[55] and therefore possess the greatest source-value of the texts in question.

[45] Guðnason in KL XII 1967, 318 ff. and references.
[46] ÍF XII, 255–272.
[47] ÍF XII, 260 ff. ASB 11, 23 ff. *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 157 ff. Sveinsson 1933, 71 and note 2.
[48] ÍF XII, 258 ff. Sveinsson 1933, 71 and note 3. Ólsen 1893, 345 ff.
[49] Ólsen 1893, 345.
[50] Sveinsson 1933, 67 ff. and references.
[51] Sveinsson 1933, 71. The same author in ÍF XII, XLIII ff.
[52] Sveinsson 1933, 71.
[53] Almqvist 1974, 68 notes 24–25 and references.
[54] ÍF XII, 260 ff. ASB 11, 23–28. *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 157–160.
[55] Almqvist 1974, 69 and references.

Résumé

The chief source on the acceptance of Christianity in Iceland is *Íslendingabók*, written by Ari the Wise 1122–33 and preserved in its original version. Ari based his accounts of events on the evidence supplied by many picked informants whom he mentions by name; many of these were born before the middle of the 11th century. The bishops of Skálholt and Hólar urged him to undertake this task and they as well as Sæmundr the Wise read it before Ari had done with it. Ari desired to be as factual as he could but both he and his informants were closely related to some of the chief figures connected with the Conversion and this may in some way have affected Ari's proportions. With this reservation *Íslendingabók* is a unique source of the conversion of the country. It must form the basis of all research into the Conversion and only when a satisfactory explanation has been found of every item in Ari's account can we look at other sources.

The second oldest source on the Conversion is the Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium by Theodoricus monachus, thought to have been written about 1180 in Norway. In all likelihood Theodoricus does not base his account on *Íslendingabók* but refers to Icelanders as his informants. These informants may have been familiar with *Íslendingabók*.

About 1190 Oddr Snorrason, monk in the monastery of Þingeyri, wrote a book in Latin about King Óláfr Tryggvason and fragments that have been preserved of its translation contain an account of the Conversion, some of it direct from *Íslendingabók*, but possibly in an older version than the existant one. Odd's work belongs to the category of uncritical history writing in the cause of the Church.

The same is true of the following three works: *Kristni saga*, said to have been compiled by Sturla Þórðarson about 1250; *Njáls saga's* "Conversion *þáttr*" in its present version from about 1280; and *Ól.Tr.m.* from the early 14th century. These three sources are probably based on a lost work about King Óláfr Tryggvason, written in Latin by Gunnlaugr Leifsson about the year 1200. Their main source cannot be traced further back. Gunnlaug's history of Óláfr is considered to have been based to some extent on Odd's work, but it was fuller and included even more legendary material. Gunnlaugr was not interested in source-criticism.

The last three works also contain a variety of items drawn from popular tradition the source-value of which is disputable. Of this the verses included in all three works are of greatest value.

VI. Preaching the faith

1. Thangbrand's mission

Ari's account of Thangbrand's mission begins with these words: *Óláfr rex Tryggvasonr . . . kom kristni í Norveg ok á Ísland.*[1] (Ólafr rex Tryggvason . . . brought Christianity into Norway and into Iceland.) Then it goes on immediately to say: *Hann sendi hingat til lands prest þann, es hét Þangbrandr ok hér kenndi mǫnnum kristni ok skírði alla, es við trú tóku.*[2] (He sent here to this country the priest named Thangbrandr who taught Christianity to men and baptized all those who accepted the faith.) When Ari says that Óláfr Tryggvason "brought" Christianity into Iceland it must mean the same as "bringing" Christianity into Norway. It is therefore most probable that by using such a phrase Ari wanted to convey the idea that the king had directly contributed to the final decision of the Icelanders to accept Christianity in the year 999. At the same time it is not inconceivable that Ari here emphasizes the fact that it was thanks to the missionary of King Óláfr, Thangbrandr, that Christianity gained its first real foothold in Iceland (see below Ch. VI.5), and that if Óláfr had not sent Thangbrandr there would have been no conversion in 999.

Next Ari refers to those chieftains whom Thangbrandr converted to Christianity. Three are mentioned by name: Síðu-Hallr, Gizurr the White and Hjalti Skeggjason. In addition Ari says that *margir hǫfðingjar aðrir* (many other chieftains) had been baptized, *en þeir váru þó fleiri, es í gegn mæltu ok neittu.*[3] (. . . but they were in the majority who spoke against it and refused.) The reason that Síðu-Hallr, Gizurr and Hjalti are named specifically is clearly because they all played an important part in the future events at the General Assembly.

Thangbrandr soon left the land: *En þá es hann hafði hér verit einn vetr eða tvá, þá fór hann á braut ok hafði vegit hér tvá menn eða þrjá, þá es hann hǫfðu nítt.*[4] (But when he had been here a winter or two he went away, having at that time killed here two or three men who had slandered him.) This sentence is a fine example of Ari's minute accuracy and of his care to say no more than he can confidently support.

[1] ÍF I, 14.
[2] ÍF I, 14.
[3] ÍF I, 14.
[4] ÍF I, 14.

When Thangbrandr returned to Norway he went to King Óláfr and gave him an account of his journey. He related to the king everything that had happened to him in Iceland, *ok lét ørvænt, at hér mundi kristni enn takask*[5] (and said that it was beyond hope that Christianity would as yet be received here). This information angered the king intensely and he gave orders that those Icelanders who were in Norway should be mutilated or killed but later repealed this decree at the plea of Gizurr and Hjalti. These had now arrived in Norway and they promised King Óláfr that they would exert themselves to get Christianity made law in Iceland, provided he would desist from his design.[6]

2. Þorgils from Ölfus

From other sources it is possible to add to the picture which Ari gives of Thangbrand's preaching. Theodoricus reports, as does Ari, that Thangbrandr baptized Síðu-Hallr, Gizurr and Hjalti, but he can also single out the fourth chieftain whom Thangbrandr converted to Christianity, a certain Þorgils from Ölfus (*quartus vero Thorgils de Aulfusi*).[7] Theodoricus is alone in this statement and because there is no knowledge of a chieftain of this name living in Ölfus at the time spoken of here scholars have wished to suggest that an error has crept into the book here. So, Storm claims in his edition of Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium that Þorgils represents Þóroddr, father of Skapti the Lawspeaker who lived at Ölfus.[8] Since then, a number of scholars have subscribed to this opinion, including Jón Jóhannesson who explains the error by the fact that there is confusion between Þóroddr goði and his son-in-law, Þorgils ǫrrabeinsstjúpr.[9] Since testimony is not available that Þóroddr accepted Christianity before most people in Iceland, this explanation must be treated warily. And it has been pointed out that it is every bit as credible that this Þorgils, whom Theodoricus refers to, is Þorgils ǫrrabeinsstjúpr himself.[10] *Flóamanna saga* says that he was among the first to accept Christianity (*tók í fyrra lagi við trú*)[11] and this arrangement of words recalls those of Ari about Síðu-Hallr, *lét skírask snimhendis*[12] (let himself be baptized early). In *Flóamanna saga*

[5] ÍF I, 15.
[6] ÍF I, 15.
[7] Storm 1880, 20.
[8] Storm 1880, 20 note 9.
[9] Jóhannesson 1956, 156 ff. Ǫrrabeinsstjúpr means the stepson of ǫrrabeinn, the man with the scars on his legs. (Helgason (ed) 1963, 100).
[10] Aðalsteinsson 1971, 64 and note 12 and references.
[11] *Flóamanna saga* 1932, 32.
[12] ÍF I, 14.

it says further that Þorgils died at Hjalli in Ölfus,[13] so it is not impossible that he lived there for some time in his old age and for that reason been called "Þorgils from Ölfus". In this case it is conceivable that Theodoricus has preserved a true Icelandic tradition.

It may be added that the suggestion (Ch. V.2 above) that Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson was Theodoricus's informant lends further support to the opinion that this is a true Icelandic tradition. Þorlákr was descended from Þorgils ǫrrabeinsstjúpr,[14] and if he was Theodoricus's informant, it would explain why this source enumerates Þorgils among those baptized by Thangbrandr.

It is significant that Theodoricus supports the report in *Íslendingabók* that, despite the specific result mentioned, the missionary journey of Thangbrandr was as a whole unsuccessful. He says that King Óláfr was dissatisfied with his work: *Theobrandus vero veniens ad regam increpatus est ab eo pro minus peracto negotio.*[15] (When Thangbrandr came back to the king he was rebuked for not having completed his task.)

3. Other sources

Details of Thangbrand's mission are also to be found in *Odd's Ólafssaga*, especially in AM 310, 4to.[16] The passage in the main agrees with *Íslendingabók* and there is little doubt that this was its main source.[17]

The most comprehensive accounts of Thangbrand's Christian preaching are in *Kristni saga, Ól.Tr.m.* and *Njáls saga's* Conversion "*þáttr*". In all these works the historical material is to a greater or less extent mingled with other passages of popular or religious nature.[18]

4. Lampooning and sorcery

From the point of view of authenticity these works' greatest value lies in their accounts of the conflict between Thangbrandr and several heathen poets.[19] All three works quote two verses by Steinunn the poetess in which she talks about the weakness of Christ when Thangbrand's ship was driven out to sea and wrecked.[20] And in these works more particular mention is

[13] *Flóamanna saga* 1932, 70.
[14] *Flómanna saga* 1932, 46; 71 note.
[15] Storm 1880, 21.
[16] *Odd's Ólafssaga* 1932, 126.
[17] *Odd's Ólafssaga* 1932, 126 ff. See above Ch. V.3 and notes 21–26.
[18] See above Ch. V.4–6.
[19] See Almqvist 1974, 55 ff.
[20] The verses are quoted in Ch. III.2 above.

made of the libellous poets whom Ari refers to casually. Two are mentioned by name. Vetrliði and Þorvaldr veili; a verse by Þorvaldr is quoted together with another by an unnamed author about the slaying of Vetrliði.[21] In Þorvald's verse Thangbrandr is called *argr goðvargr*[22] (a "pervert god-outcast") and in the verse about the slaying of Vetrliði it is stated that a strong man, Guðleifr Arason from Reykjahólar, had fought in Thangbrand's defence.[23] Thangbrandr and Guðleifr are said to have killed Þorvaldr veili near Hestlækr.[24]

The sources relating the lampooning and the subsequent killings are trustworthy, in particular because the verses describing these incidents have lived and seem not to have been altered.[25] Lampooning was one of the sharpest weapons of heathendom and it was very difficult to live with it, as best can be seen from the killings that the missionaries committed rather than suffer the defamation.[26]

All three works tell of Thangbrand's visit to Surtr Ásbjarnarson at Kirkjubær. Special interest is attached to this because Christian men are said to have lived there all the time from the period of settlement: *Þar bjó þá Surtr Ásbjarnarson, Þorsteinssonar, Ketilssonar ens fíflska; þessir langfeðgar ... voru allir kristnir.*[27] (There lived Surtr son of Ásbjǫrn son of Þorsteinn, son of Ketill enn fíflski; all the men in this line were Christians.)

Among the edifying and legendary sections which appear in practically the same guise in all three works is the story of the conflict between Thangbrandr and Galdra-Héðinn. When Thangbrandr rode from Kirkjubær to the Althing the earth opened in front of him and swallowed his horse but he managed to get off it and was saved. This Galdra-Héðinn was supposed to have caused with his witchcraft.[28] Sigurður Nordal has offered an explanation for this tale, suggesting that Thangbrand's horse sank in a quagmire formed by an iceberg that had been left in Mýrdalssandur in a flood caused by a subglacial volcanic eruption.[29] Sigurður Þórarinsson finds this explanation probable.[30] This adds to the credibility of the account. On the other hand it was natural that if Thangbrand's horse was swallowed up in the earth, it should be interpreted as a tangible proof of heathen hostility to the missionary. This is only an explanation of the event.

[21] ASB 11, 22 ff. ÍF XII, 260 ff. *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 157 ff.
[22] ASB 11, 23. ÍF XII, 262. *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 158.
[23] ASB 11, 22 f. ÍF XII,260 f. *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 157 f.
[24] ASB 11, 25. ÍF XII, 264. *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 158.
[25] Almqvist 1974, 55 ff.
[26] Almqvist 1974, 38 and note 36 and references.
[27] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 156. ASB 11, 21. See above Ch. II.6 and note 75. ÍF XII, 259.
[28] ASB 11, 21. *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 156 f. ÍF XII, 259.
[29] Nordal 1928, 113.
[30] Þórarinsson 1968, 21.

Whether or not the heathens resorted to sorcery against Thangbrandr is not of paramount importance, but it is a fact that they were considered to have done so with some success.

5. The part played by Óláfr Tryggvason in Thangbrand's mission

In *Ól.Tr.m.* and *Kristni saga* it is said that Óláfr Tryggvason directed Thangbrandr to Síðu-Hallr, if he should come to the Eastfjords (*ef hann kvæmi í Austfjǫrðu*).[31] Síðu-Hallr was of a powerful family and descended from kings and earls as will be related later (see below Ch. X.1). Whatever may be said about the trustworthiness of this source it must have been natural for the king to direct Thangbrandr to Síðu-Hallr and it is stated that Thangbrandr achieved some of his greatest successes on his journey with Síðu-Hallr to the Althing.[32] The account of Thangbrandr going to Síðu-Hallr with a message from King Óláfr is made more plausible by the fact that the two other chieftains who, according to Ari, were baptized by Thangbrandr and next to Síðu-Hallr were most instrumental in bringing about the acceptance of Christianity, were Gizurr the White and his son-in-law, Hjalti Skeggjason. Gizurr was closely related to the king,[33] and on that account it is reasonable to believe that he would welcome Óláf's emissary as *Ól.Tr.m.* and *Kristni saga* say he did.[34] And this kinship and friendship with King Óláfr must have been a big factor in his decision to be baptized.[35] Therefore my conclusion is that even in our scanty sources one can detect considerable personal influence from King Óláfr in Thangbrand's mission.

6. The exclusive contents of Njáls saga. Place-names

More detailed accounts of Thangbrand's mission in the south of Iceland exist only in *Njáls saga*. There it says that, in addition to Síðu-Hallr, Gizurr and Hjalti, the following chieftains in the South received baptism at the hands of Thangbrandr: Hildir the Old, Njáll at Bergþórshvoll, Kolr Þorsteinsson and Ingjaldr Þorkelsson. As well as these some men consented to "prime-signing"; among these was Flosi Þórðarson.[36]

In *Ól.Tr.m.* and *Kristni saga* a few places are mentioned that are said to

[31] ASB 11, 20. *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 151. ÍF XII, 258 ff.
[32] ASB 11, 21 f. *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 156 ff.
[33] ÍF I, 214 f. and note 8 and references.
[34] ASB 11, 26 f. *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 159.
[35] Gizurr may have had close aquaintance with Christianity before Thangbrandr visited him. There is a possibility that he was at that time married to his second wife, Þórdis eyverska, who was probably Christian. See Jóhannesson 1958, 133 and ÍF I, 439.
[36] ÍF XII, 258 ff. On the source-value see Ch. V.6 above note 49.

get their names from Thangbrandr. Thangbrand's pond (Þangbrandspollr) by lake Mývatn, Thangbrand's brook (Þangbrandslækr) in Öxarfjord, Thangbrand's harbour or shipshelter (*hǫfn* or *hróf*) in Álftafjord eystra and Thangbrand's ship-shelter in the river Hítará in the district of Mýrar.[37] Jón Jóhannesson thinks it probable that these places were in fact termed after the missionary Thangbrandr and that the two Thangbrand's ship-shelters indicate the possibility that Thangbrandr was here not one winter but two.[38] Jóhannesson may be correct for it is certain that the personal name does not otherwise occur in Icelandic sources.[39]

7. A comparison of the sources relating to Thangbrand's mission

The principal conclusion to be drawn from the comparison between *Íslendingabók* and the later sources is that the material found only in the later sources agrees on the whole with what Ari has to say and often supports his account. These accounts agree that Thangbrandr was successful in winning certain chieftains to his cause. When Ari the Wise says that "many other chieftains" had received baptism from Thangbrandr as well as Síðu-Hallr, Gizurr and Hjalti, it is probable that he had in mind those men which the Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium and *Njáls saga* also report as having been converted by Thangbrandr.[40] In addition to the men who are named it is not improbable that some more had turned to Christianity or had responded to its advance not unkindly. However that may be, it is beyond doubt that in terms of personal conversion Thangbrandr achieved considerable success in his mission. At the same time it is equally certain that on the national scale the king wanted the results of his mission were not as expected and in this respect the latter part of the sentence cited from Ari seems significant: "but they were in majority who spoke against it and refused".

As proposed above, the words of Ari about the active opposition of the libellous poets receive support in the later works. In all the verses cited the mention is made in one way or another of how abruptly Thangbrand's mission ended.[41] No other inference can be drawn from the verses than that it was a comparative failure. We see the same situation in the words used by Ari: "that it was beyond hope that Christianity would as yet be received here".

[37] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 151; 157; 159. ASB 11; 20; 22; 26.
[38] Jóhannesson 1956, 157.
[39] Pálsson 1960, 29; 166.
[40] See above Ch. VI.2 and VI.6.
[41] See above Ch. V.6 and note 53 and references. See further above Ch. VI.4 and notes 19–26 and references.

8. The mission of Friðrik and Þorvaldr

Ari the Wise says only that Bishop Friðrik had come to Iceland before Christianity was accepted there.[42] The principal sources dealing with the mission of Friðrik, a missionary bishop from Saxland, and Þorvaldr víðförli Koðránsson from Giljá, are *Kristni saga* and *Ól.Tr.m.* which incorporates a separate section about Þorvaldr víðförli.[43] According to these sources, the missionary activity of Friðrik and Þorvaldr occupied the years from 981 to 986.[44] The first winter they spent with Þorvald's father at Giljá in the Húnavatn district, but then they built a home at Lækjamót in Víðidalr and lived there four years. Their preaching is said to have borne some fruit in the North and it is told how some relatives of Þorvald's together with a few others (see below Ch. VI.13), accepted Christianity. But it is not explicitly stated whether the *goðar* sided with the missionaries.[45]

The attempt to preach the faith in the Western Quarter was profitless as is evidenced e.g. by a verse attributed to Þorvaldr, which relates of his dealing with Friðgerðr, the mistress of Hvammr in Dalir, and her son:

Fórk með dóm enn dýra;
drengr hlýddi mér engi;
gótum háð at hreyti
hlautteins, goða sveini,
en við enga svinnu
aldin rýgr við skaldi
(þá kreppi goð gyðju)
gall of heiðnum stalla.[46]

(I brought the cherished Christianity, but no-one harkened to me. I was lampooned by the servant of the pagan gods, who sprinkles the sacrificial blood. And the old hag chanted madly at the pagan altar against the skald (Þorvaldr). May god smash this heathen priestess.)

The text introducing Þorvald's verse has it that he came to Hvammr and preached the faith, while Friðgerðr conducted a sacrifice. In *Ól.Tr.m.* we are told that she did this indoors but *Kristni saga* has her do this in the temple, the sources agreeing that Þorvaldr and Friðgerðr could hear each other. In *Ól.Tr.m.* the young boy, Skeggi, ridicules Þorvaldr whereas in *Kristni saga* he makes fun of them both.[47] The picture we get of these events from the introductory text is both strange and incredible, which i.a. results in the author of *Kristni saga* trying to alter the story so it might better fit the facts

[42] ÍF I, 18.
[43] ASB 11, 1 ff.; 59 ff. *Ól.Tr.m.* 1 1958, 280 ff.
[44] ASB 11, 1 f.; 13.
[45] ASB 11, 6 ff.; 64 ff. *Ól.Tr.m.* 1 1958, 284 ff.
[46] Skj. B 1, 105. A 1, 110.
[47] ASB 11, 9. *Ól.Tr.m.* 1 1958, 290.

as he could imagine them.[48] And on closer examination it appears as the text might to some extent be based on the verse. This indicates that the verse is older than its prose frame in *Kristni saga* and *Ól.Tr.m.* The verse tells us of the trials of the missionary talking to a heathen brickwall. And if the verse was really composed by Þorvaldr, which is not impossible, it goes to show how unfruitful his mission was at this particular place.[49]

When Friðrik and Þorvaldr were so bold as to preach the Christian faith at the General Assembly the heathens turned to studied defence. Heathen poets made a lampoon on the bishop and Þorvaldr, in which this is found:

Hefr bǫrn borit
byskup níu,
þeira 's allra
Þórvaldr faðir.[50]

(The bishop has born nine children. Þorvaldr sired them all.)

Bo Almqvist has recently studied this verse closely and argued convincingly that it is based on actual events.[51] According to *Ól.Tr.m.* and *Kristni saga* the consequence of this versification was that Þorvaldr killed two men.[52] Opposition against Þorvaldr and Friðrik now grew; they were sentenced at the Assembly and left the country after a stay of five years.[53] In *Kristni saga* it says that their preaching had been to little avail: *enn flestir menn vikuz lítt undir af orðum þeirra.*[54] (But most men were little moved to assent in response to their words.) What the author of *Kristni saga* says here is probably close to the truth and the preaching of Friðrik and Þorvaldr probably had no lasting influence.

9. Stefni's mission

Ari the Wise does not mention Stefni's mission. The sources dealing with his missionary activity are *Kristni saga* and *Ól.Tr.m.* According to them King Óláfr Tryggvason sent the Icelander, Stefnir Þorgilsson, near the year of 996 to preach Christianity to his countrymen.[55] It is worthy of mention that one of Stefni's greatgrandfathers, Helgi bjóla at Hof in Kjalarnes, was among the Christian settlers in Iceland.[56]

[48] ASB 11, 9.
[49] Almqvist 1974, 14 and note 7 and references.
[50] Skj. B 1, 168. A 1, 178. The verse is translated according to Almqvist's interpretation. Almqvist 1974, 26 ff.
[51] Almqvist 1974, 26 ff. and references.
[52] *Ól.Tr.m.* 1 1958, 293 says: *tvá þá er ort hǫfðu*, but *Kristni saga*, ASB 11, 12: *Fyrir nið þat vá Þorvaldr tvá menn.*
[53] ASB 11, 12 f. *Ól.Tr.m.* 1 1958, 296 ff.
[54] ASB 11, 6.
[55] ASB 11, 17. *Ól.Tr.m.* 1 1958, 309.
[56] ÍF I, 50 ff. ASB 11, 16. *Ól.Tr.m.* 1 1958, 300 f. See above Ch. II.6.

Kristni saga and *Ól.Tr.m.* make much of the hostile reception Stefnir got in Iceland: *tóku þeir við honum illa ok ómannlega, en þó frændr hans allra verst*[57] (they received him in an inhospitable and inhuman way, and his kinsmen worst of all) it says in *Ól.Tr.m.* (see below Ch. VI.12). When Stefnir began to destroy sanctuaries and altars and damage images of the gods, the heathens resorted to active opposition and drove him away from the temples and idols according to *Ól.Tr.m.*, whereas in *Kristni saga* Stefnir narrowly escaped to his relatives in Kjalarnes.[58] When his ship was blown out to sea during the winter the pagans are supposed to have made this verse:

Nú hefr stafna Val Stefnis
(straumr ferr of hol knerri)
felliveðr (af fjalli)
fjallrænt brotit allan;
heldr getum vér, at valdi,
vesa munu bǫnd í landi,
(geysar ǫ́ með ísi)
ásríki gný slíkum.[59]

(A tempest down from the mountains has completely wrecked Stefni's ship. A flood from the mountain surges into the vessel. We reckon sure enough that the divine might (of the Æsir) cause this fury—the river rushes on with ice-warps—the gods must still be in the country.)

Thus similar things are said to befall Stefnir and his ship as Thangbrandr (see above Ch.III.2). So it is not an unreasonable conjecture to hold that one account is an imitation of the other. As the sources on Thangbrandr are much more reliable and the author of the verses about him mentioned by name, it can be surmised that the story of Stefni's ship and the verse are based on the account of Thangbrandr and the verses. Still, it is not inconceivable that similar things may have befallen both missionaries and produced the same kind of reaction from the pagan population. The scholar, who has taken the closest look at this material in recent years, Bo Almqvist, assumes that the verses in each case are original and describe two separate events.[60] I will not attempt to show which hypothesis is more probable, i.e. whether all the verses were originally connected with definite events or the verse about Stefnir is an imitation of Steinunn's verses. The verse about Stefnir is in either case a proof that ideas were current about mighty "Æsir" who once upon a time throve in Iceland.

No men baptized or "prime-signed" by Stefnir are mentioned by name in the sources[61] and everything suggests to the fact that his preaching had little effect.

[57] *Ól.Tr.m.* 1 1958, 310. ASB 11, 17.
[58] *Ól.Tr.m.* 1 1958, 310. ASB 11, 17.
[59] Skj. B 1, 169. A 1, 179.
[60] Almqvist 1974, 20 ff.
[61] *Ól.Tr.m.* 1 1958, 308–11. ASB 11, 16–19.

10. The "frændaskǫmm" legislation

The most remarkable detail in the account dealing with Stefni's mission is the mention of a special law at the General Assembly directed against Stefnir and his like. There are two versions of this legislation in the sources. In *Ól.Tr.m.* it says: *Á því sumri var þat í lǫg tekit á alþingi, at hvern þann mann skyldi gera sekan ok útlaga, er lastaði goðin eða gerði þeim nǫckura meingerð eða ósœmd. Skyldu þær sakir sœkja frændr þeirra, er fyrir sǫkum váru hafðir, þremenningar ok fjórmenningar ok þar í milli, því at heiðnir menn kǫlluðu kristnina frændaskǫmm.*[62] (In that summer a law was passed at the General Assembly that every man should be convicted and made an outlaw who reviled the gods or did them any damage or dishonour. The relatives of the person accused, second or third cousins or between these degrees, should be the ones to prosecute them because the heathens called Christianity a shame to one's kinsmen.)

Kristni saga only states that it was stipulated that: *frændr enna kristnu manna skyldu sœkja þá um goðlǫstun nánari (en) þriðju bræðra ok fírnari en næstu bræðra ... því at kristnin var þá kǫlluð frændaskǫmm.*[63] (the relatives of Christians closer than fourth cousins and further removed than second cousins should prosecute them for blasphemy ... because Christianity was then called a shame to one's kinsmen.) Both sources mention that Stefnir was prosecuted by his relatives in accordance with this law, whereupon he left the country.[64]

It has been shown above that *Kristni saga* and *Ól.Tr.m.* do not agree on how close the relatives should be who were to bring charges against the Christians.[65] Konrad Maurer has dealt with this incongruity and he gives examples of divergent uses of relationship concept in the various sources, which he suggests may account for the incongruity.[66] Björn M. Ólsen has also dealt with this issue and made comparison with ancient legislation about family ties in *Grágás* where a distinction is drawn between close and distant relatives.[67] Ólsen's surmise is that the text in both sources has been distorted and *Ól.Tr.m.* should read fourth cousin for third cousin and *Kristni saga* "second cousins and fourth cousins and those between". He argues that the error might be due to a wrong translation from Latin on one hand and faulty transcription of a manuscript on the other.[68] This incongruity does not closely concern our case so we shall not make any further attempt to find an answer.

[62] *Ól.Tr.m.* 1 1958, 310.
[63] ASB 11, 18 f.
[64] ASB 11, 19. *Ól.Tr.m.* 1 1958, 310 f.
[65] See further Kahle in ASB 11, 18 notes 2–4.
[66] Maurer I 1855, 377 ff. and references.
[67] Ólsen 1900, 24 ff. *Grágás* I, 193 ff.
[68] Ólsen 1900, 25 f.

In *Ól.Tr.m.* it says that the new law covered blasphemy in words and deeds and included the stipulation that the relatives of Christians should prosecute them, whereas *Kristni saga* only states that the new article concerned prosecution of Christians by their relatives for blasphemy. Björn M. Ólsen thinks that *Kristni saga* is correct, the novelty being the prosecution by relatives so that the property of the accused was not completely lost to the family.[69] This is a plausible conclusion, for the old law would then have contained a statue on blasphemy but the new article was inserted when cases of sacrilege became so common that there was danger that property was lost to families wholesale. But as Bo Almqvist has pointed out, *Ól.Tr.m.* is probably correct in having the new article cover blasphemy in words and in deeds.[70]

Both sources state that the relatives of Christians "should bring charges". If we interpret this literally we may reasonably conclude that the prosecution was mandatory and the kinsmen of the Christians had to prosecute them. Björn M. Ólsen does not favour so literal an interpretation of the words of *Kristni saga* and *Ól.Tr.m.* He thinks the relatives only obtained priority rights to prosecute Christians; their right was permissive and they could prosecute their Christian kinsmen if they wanted to. But should the relatives not desire to bring charges anyone could do so.[71]

In support of this conclusion Ólsen cites the case of Hjalti Skeggjason, who was made an outlaw on charges of blasphemy a year before the Conversion of the country took place according to Ari the Wise. *Íslendingabók* says: *En þat var till þess haft, at hann kvað at lǫgbergi kviðling þenna:*

> *Vil ek eigi goð geyja;*
> *grey þykki mér Freyja.*[72]

(And this was done because he spoke this ditty at Lǫgberg:

> I do not wish to blaspheme the gods
> But I think that Freyja is a bitch.)

Ari does not state who brought charges against Hjalti, but *Landnámabók*, S and H, as well as *Kristni saga* and *Ól.Tr.m.* name Rúnólfr Úlfsson goði.[73] There is no evidence that Hjalti and Rúnólfr were related and Ólsen bases his conclusion i.a. on this when he holds that anyone could take up the case if the relatives shunned their priority rights.[74]

[69] Ólsen 1900, 26.
[70] Almqvist 1974, 15 and note 10.
[71] Ólsen 1900, 26.
[72] ÍF I, 15.
[73] ÍF I, 368. ASB 11, 30. *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 162.
[74] Ólsen 1900, 26 f.

One may question the historical authenticity of the accounts in *Kristni saga* and *Ól.Tr.m.* of this legislation. As has been shown above (Ch.V.4-5) these works are not reliable sources and betray a definite bias. Nevertheless it could not promote the interest of the Church to specify that Christianity had been considered a disgrace to the family. This is one of the reasons why I find it probable that the accounts of this legislation are based on history and the scholars who have dealt with this subject most fully assume the same.[75] When blasphemy increased, it was natural, as Ólsen has pointed out and Almqvist has corroborated, that measures should be taken to ensure that the property of the convicted person was to some extent kept in the family.[76] Thus the legislation makes sense. And the case of Hjalti strongly suggests that pagan relatives only had priority rights.

11. Heathen resistance in Northern Europe

In his book on the relations between heathendom and Christiantity in Northern Europe Fredrik Paasche gives examples to show that paganism did not fall at the first blow.[77] After initial triumph the missionaries often met with increased hostility. In Sweden this stemmed from the public. The king had allowed the preaching of the new religion, but the ordinary people were faithful to the old gods and when Ansgar left, the Swedes attacked Gautbert and killed his relative, Nithard.[78] Bede tells a story of two English missionaries who crossed the Rhine and stayed for some time with a farmer whom they asked to take them to his chieftain. But the farmer discovered that these men preached a new faith and as he feared that they might be able to convert the chieftain he did not think it prudent to take them along. To be quite safe he killed the missionaries and threw the corpses into the Rhine. According to Bede this happened in 695.[79]

In Sweden it was certain death or mutilation for the missionaries to attack the chief heathen place of worship, the temple at Uppsala. Adam of Bremen mentions that when Óláfr *skautkonungr* was engaged in missionary activity in Sweden and expressed the idea of destroying the temple at Uppsala he had to flee to another district.[80] And the Anglo-Saxon missionary Wolfred, who preached Christianity to the Swedes, with great "love of God" as Adam of Bremen calls it, appears to have attacked the heathen gods at an assembly in Uppsala, cursed Thór in the presence of the

[75] Ólsen 1900, 24 ff. Almqvist 1974, 15 ff. Maurer I 1855, 376 ff.
[76] Ólsen 1900, 26. Almqvist 1974, 15 and note 10.
[77] Paasche 1958, 90 ff.
[78] Rimbert 1884, 38.
[79] Bede 1882, V, 10.
[80] Adam 1917, II, 58.

heathens at the assembly and smashed a statue of him. The heathens grabbed him, killed him, quartered him and threw the parts in a tub.[81]

The heathens in Northern Europe sometimes seem to have greeted missionaries with a curious amity. Bede describes how the heathens flocked to listen to the first missionaries in England.[82] Wilfred the first missionary in Frisia was in favour with King Aldgils and was allowed to preach at will.[83] Ansgar was kindly received by the Swedes when he first arrived there and when King Björn had consulted his counsellors he granted him permission to preach the gospel. And he allowed everyone to listen to the missionary and his followers.[84]

It thus appears to have been the nature of heathendom in Northern Europe to greet missionaries with curiosity and friendliness at first. But after initial triumph the missionaries often met with increased hostility.

12. Heathen resistance in Iceland

The accounts we have of the mission of Þorvaldr víðförli and Bishop Friðrik suggest that they were not badly received at first (above Ch. VI.8). If it is true that they stayed in Iceland for 5 years it shows how tolerant the pagans were of their mission. The sources also indicate that the missionaries only met with active hostility when they started preaching their faith at the pagan assemblies. Then the lampooning campaign started, which led to the missionaries being convicted and forced to leave the country. This resembles the reaction of the pagan Swedes which became fiercest when the missionaries were foolhardy enough to push their case at a pagan meeting.

The description of the pagan reaction to Stefni's mission bears even closer resemblance to the Swedish reaction mentioned above. Stefnir is said to have attacked temples and idols in much the same way as Wolfred (above Ch. VI.9 and 11). And Stefnir would probably have suffered the same fate if he had not managed to seek refuge with his relatives when the heathens pursued him, or so we are told in *Kristni saga*.[85]

The similarity between these accounts may be due to Gunnlaugr monk and other writers about missionary activities in Iceland having had access to accounts of the hardship suffered by missionaries elsewhere in the Nordic countries at the hands of the pagan population.[86] Such foreign influence

[81] Adam 1917 II, 62.
[82] Bede 1882 V, 19.
[83] Paasche 1958, 90.
[84] Rimbert 1884, 32.
[85] ASB 11, 17.
[86] See above Ch. V.5 and notes 33 and 35.

does not, however, rule out historicity in these accounts, even if they on the whole adopt international forms.[87] In the accounts of the mission the lampooning appears to be of indubitable Icelandic origin. As traced above (Ch. VI.8 and note 52), the lampoon about Bishop Friðrik and Þorvaldr is considered to be based on actuality. And when the pagan resistance to Thangbrand's mission is described in the most reliable of our sources, it is the lampooning which features most in the pagan reaction (Ch. VI.2 and 4 above) and is apparently preserved in contemporary sources.[88] Thus it is the lampooning which gives the most reliable indication of pagan opposition to the Christian missionaries in Iceland.

13. The number of pagans and Christians at the end of the missionary period

The preaching of Þorvaldr víðförli and Bishop Friðrik is said to have borne some fruit in the North (see Ch. VI.8). *Ól.Tr.m.* and *Kristni saga* also state that Bishop Friðrik baptized a few noble men, Önundr Þorgilsson, Hlenni the Old and Þorvarðr Spakbǫðvarsson.[89] *Kristni saga* also mentions Eyjólfr Valgerðarson as having been primesigned and *Ól.Tr.m.* that still others were fully converted by their preaching.[90]

Stefni's mission appears to have been even more futile and no men baptized or primesigned by him are mentioned by name.[91]

The source-value of *Kristni saga* and *Ól.Tr.m.* and the motivation of their authors have already been dealt with (above Ch. V.4—5). One would therefore not expect them wittingly to minimise the success of the missionary activities.

Thangbrandr was by far the most successful of the missionaries. Even so, the number baptized by him was not big, taking all the persons mentioned in the various sources into account (above Ch. VI.1—7).

In *Vápnfirðinga saga*, thought to be written in the first half of the 13th century,[92] we are told about Þorleifr kristni (the Christian), as he was called, and how charges were brought against him on account of his being Christian, i.e. for refusing to pay his temple dues.[93] This is supposed to have occurred in 970.[94] The nickname "Christian" has an authentic ring but many

[87] See above Ch. I.2 and note 17.
[88] See above Ch. VI.4 and note 25 and references.
[89] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 179 and 291. ASB 11, 6.
[90] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 291. ASB 11, 6.
[91] *Ól.Tr.m.* 1 1958, 308—11. ASB 11, 16—19. See above Ch. VI.10.
[92] Jóhannesson in ÍF XI, XXVII.
[93] ÍF XI, 28; 33 ff.
[94] ÍF XI, XXII.

things are uncertain about this account in *Vápnfirðinga saga* and its relation to other sources.[95] This story is also contained in *Kristni saga* and *Ól.Tr.m.* but Þorleifr is here given the nickname "Christian" only in the latter.[96]

Then we may include Surtr Ásbjarnarson (above Ch. VI.4 and note 27) and probably Þórdís eyverska (above Ch. VI.5 note 35) among the people who had been converted to Christianity but not, as far as we know, by the named missionaries. One may safely assume that there were others who belonged to this category.

When charges were brought against Hjalti Skeggjason for blasphemy at the General Assembly the year before Christianity was accepted by law (Ch. VI.10 above), the Christians were so aggressive that it was not possible to start court proceedings until the court had been transferred to the bridge on the river Öxará and armed guards placed at both ends, according to *Kristni saga* and *Ól.Tr.m.*[97] If this is historically correct it shows that the Christians were already then quite powerful. Hjalti and Gizurr and their retainers of course headed the Christian party.

As far as we can judge the position a year before the Conversion, it seems that Christianity had gained a firm foothold in Iceland, owing not least to the impact of Thangbrand's mission. But Thangbrandr met with no less active opposition than the other missionaries, in particular from the poets. It is very difficult on the basis of the scanty sources to assess the relative strength of paganism and Christianity at this time. The most reliable source, Ari's *Íslendingabók*, states that Síðu-Hallr, Gizurr and Hjalti were baptized by Thangbrandr and many other chieftains. If we add those who had been converted before Thangbrandr came the total may have been substantial. Still, only a few of the real rulers appear to be of this party. Ari warns his readers not to overestimate the position of Christianity: but they were in the majority who spoke against it and refused (see Ch. VI.2). These words can only mean that the majority of Icelanders turned against Thangbrand's mission. And this is further confirmed by Thangbrand's report to King Óláfr Tryggvason which Ari cites: "and said that it was beyond hope that Christianity would as yet be received here" (above Ch. VI.7).

Our conclusion therefore is that Christianity had gained a firm foothold in the country a year before the Conversion, but that the opposition against it was active and powerful. The majority of Icelanders were heathen, as were also most of the really powerful chieftains in the country.

[95] Jóhannesson in ÍF XI, XVII f.
[96] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 193. ASB 11, 40 f.
[97] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 162. ASB 11, 31.

Résumé

In *Íslendingabók* Ari describes the mission of Thangbrandr who was sent to Iceland by Óláfr Tryggvason. He mentions three influential chieftains who were baptized in addition to many other people. But there were more who turned against the missionary. Ari says Thangbrandr was lampooned, whereupon he left the country and told King Óláfr that there was no hope that Icelanders would receive the faith as yet.

Younger sources enumerate more chieftains and give more detailed information about the lampooning of Thangbrandr, apparently based on contemporary sources. These younger sources also indicate that King Óláfr played an important part in Thangbrand's mission. The younger sources confirm Ari's account that Thangbrandr was fairly successful in his mission but that he was forced to abandon it rather abruptly.

Ari mentions that a Bishop Friðrik had come to Iceland while *Kristni saga* and *Ól.Tr.m.* connect his mission with Þorvaldr víðförli. A few men are named as having been baptized by Bishop Friðrik, and a ditty lampooning him and Þorvaldr has been preserved, probably based on reality. Another verse, attributed to Þorvaldr, describes the hopeless task of the missionary in particular circumstances, faced with a pagan priestess. Friðrik and Þorvaldr, who are said to have been in Iceland from 981 to 986, were driven out of the country, ridiculed and convicted.

A third missionary, Stefnir, whom Ari does not mention, was in Iceland for one year near 996 on the authority of *Ól.Tr.m.* and *Kristni saga*. He was sent by Óláfr Tryggvason but met with no success and as a result of his mission new legislation was passed permitting the relatives of Christians to prosecute them for blasphemy. The reason was probably to ensure that property was not lost to families on a large scale. A verse is preserved describing how the powerful "Æsir" wrecked Stefni's ship.

The accounts of Christian missions to Iceland resemble in many ways accounts of missionary activities elsewhere in Northern Europe. This could be explained by the Icelandic scribes having had foreign works as their models. But special Icelandic phenomenon in these accounts is the lampooning, which is the most reliable indication of Icelandic opposition to the missionaries.

At about the time the mission drew to a close in Iceland Christianity had gained a secure foothold in the country. Opposition against it was nevertheless fierce, especially among the poets. The majority of Icelanders were heathen as well as most of the chieftains.

VII. At the general assembly

1. The evidence of *Íslendingabók*

The summer after Thangbrandr returned to Norway, Gizurr and Hjalti sailed to Iceland. It was time for them to fulfil the promise they had made to Óláfr Tryggvason to further Christianity among the Icelanders (above Ch. VI.1). Ari relates this in *Íslendingabók*:

En et næsta sumar eptir fóru þeir austan ok prestr sá es Þormóðr *hét, ok kvómu þá í Vestmannaeyjar, es tíu vikur váru af sumri, ok hafði allt farizk vel at. Svá kvað Teitr þann segja, es sjalfr vas þar.* Þá *vas þat mælt et næsta sumar áðr í lǫgum, at menn skyldi svá koma til alþingis, es tíu vikur væri af sumri, en þangat til kvómu viku fyrr. En þeir fóru þegar inn til meginlands ok síðan til alþingis ok gátu at Hjalta, at hann vas eptir í Laugardali með tolfta mann, af því at hann hafði áðr sekr orðit fjǫrbaugsmaðr et næsta sumar á alþingi of goðgá. . . .*

En þeir Gizurr fóru, unz þeir kvómu í stað þann hjá Ǫlfossvatni, es kallaðr es Vellankatla, ok gørðu orð þaðan til þings, at á mót þeim skyldi koma allir fulltingsmenn þeira, af því at þeir hǫfðu spurt, at andskotar þeira vildi verja þeim vígi þingvǫllinn. En fyrr en þeir færi þaðan, þá kom þar riðandi Hjalti ok þeir es eptir váru með hónum. En síðan riðu þeir á þingit, ok kvómu áðr á mót þeim frændr þeira ok vinir sem þeir hǫfðu æst. En enir heiðnu menn hurfu saman með alvæpni, ok hafði svá nær, at þeir myndi berjask at (eigi) of sá á miðli. En annan dag eptir gingu þeir Gizurr ok Hjalti til lǫgbergs ok báru þar upp erindi sín. En svá es sagt, at þat bæri frá hvé vel þeir mæltu. En þat gørðisk af því, at þar nefndi annarr maðr at ǫðrum vátta, ok sǫgðusk hvárir ýr lǫgum við aðra, enir kristnu menn ok enir heiðnu, ok gingu síðan frá lǫgbergi. Þá *báðu enir kristnu menn Hall á Síðu, at hann skyldi lǫg þeira upp segja, þau es kristninni skyldi fylgja. En hann leystisk því undan við þá, at hann keypti at* Þorgeiri lǫgsǫgumanni, *at hann skyldi upp segja, en hann vas enn þá heiðinn. En síðan es menn kvómu í búðir, þá lagðisk hann niðr* Þorgeirr *ok breiddi feld sinn á sik ok hvíldi þann dag allan ok nóttina eptir ok kvað ekki orð. En of morguninn eptir settisk hann upp ok gørði orð, at menn skyldi ganga til lǫgbergis. En þá hóf hann tǫlu sína upp, es menn kvómu þar, ok sagði, at hónum þótti þá komit hag manna í ónýtt efni, ef menn skyldi eigi hafa allir lǫg ein á landi hér, ok talði fyrir mǫnnum á marga vega, at þat skyldi eigi láta verða, ok sagði, at þat mundi at því ósætti verða, es vísa ván vas, at þær barsmíðir gørðisk á miðli manna, es landit eyddisk af. Hann sagði frá því, at konungar ýr*

Norvegi ok ýr Danmǫrku hǫfðu haft ófrið ok orrostur á miðli sín langa tíð, til þess unz landsmenn gǫrðu frið á miðli þeira, þótt þeir vildi eigi. En þat ráð gørðisk svá, at af stundu sendusk þeir gersemar á miðli, enda helt friðr sá, meðan þeir lifðu. "En nú þykkir mér þat ráð", kvað hann, "at vér látim ok eigi þá ráða, es mest vilja í gegn gangask, ok miðlum svá mál á miðli þeira, at hvárirtveggju hafi nakkvat síns máls, ok hǫfum allir ein lǫg ok einn sið. Þat mon verða satt, es vér slítum í sundr lǫgin, at vér monum slíta ok friðinn."

En hann lauk svá máli sínu, at hvárirtveggju játtu því, at allir skyldu ein lǫg hafa, þau sem hann réði upp at segja. Þá vas þat mælt í lǫgum, at allir menn skyldi kristnir vesa ok skírn taka, þeir es áðr váru óskírðir á landi hér; en of barnaútburð skyldu standa en fornu lǫg ok of hrossakjǫtsát. Skyldu menn blóta á laun, ef vildu, en varða fjǫrbaugsgarðr, ef váttum of kvæmi við. En síðarr fám vetrum vas sú heiðni af numin sem ǫnnur.

Þenna atburð sagði Teitr oss at því, es kristni kom á Ísland.[1]

(And the next summer afterwards they came from Norway, and the priest who was named Þormóðr, and came to Vestmannaeyjar when ten weeks of the summer were past, and they had had a good passage. So Teitr said that a man who was himself there said. It was made law the summer before this that men should come to the Assembly when ten weeks of summer were gone, but hitherto men used to come the week before. But they went at once to the mainland and then to the Assembly, and got Hjalti to stay behind in Laugardalr with eleven men, because he had been made a lesser outlaw the summer before at the Assembly for blasphemy...

But Gizurr and those who were with him came to the place hard by Ölfossvatn, that is called Vellankatla, and thence sent word to the Assembly that all the men of their party should come to meet them, because they had heard that their adversaries would try to keep them away from the Assembly ground by force of arms. But before they left there Hjalti came riding to them and those who had stayed behind with him. And then they rode to the Assembly, and their kinsmen and friends came beforehand to meet them as they had asked. But the heathen men gathered together fully armed, and it came so near to fighting between them that one could not see which way it would go. But on the next day Gizurr and Hjalti went to Lǫgberg and there voiced their errand, and it is said that they spoke extraordinarily well. And the outcome of that was that one man after another named witnesses and declared himself out of law with the others, the Christians and the heathens, and then they went away from Lǫgberg. Then the Christian men asked Síðu-Hallr to declare the laws which should go with Christianity; but he got clear of this by feeing Þorgeir the Lawspeaker

[1] ÍF I, 15 ff.

that he should declare them, and he was still a heathen. And then when men went to the booths, Þorgeir lay down and spread his cloak over him, and rested all that day and the night after, and did not speak a word. But the next morning he sat up and gave the word for men to go to Lǫgberg. And when men were come there he began his speech, and said that he thought that the people's condition would be in a sorry plight, if men were not all to have the same laws here in the country. And he persuaded men in many ways that they should never let this come about, saying that it would lead to such disturbance that it was certain that the resulting conflicts would lay waste the country. He told how kings of Norway and Denmark had carried on war and battles between them for a long time, till the men of those countries made peace between them, though they (the kings) did not wish it; and this course of action turned out so well that within a little while the kings were sending each other treasures and the peace lasted as long as they lived. "And now this seems to me the best counsel," he said, "that we do not let those prevail who are most eager to go against each other, but let us so mediate the matter between the two sides that each may win part of his case, and let us all have one law and one religion. For this will turn out to be true, that if we rend asunder the laws we shall also rend the peace."

And he ended his speech with each side agreeing to this, that all should have the same laws, those which he should announce. Then it was declared to be law that all people should be Christians and receive baptism who were previously unbaptized here in the land; but that as to exposure of children the old laws should stand, and also as to the eating of horseflesh. Men might sacrifice secretly if they wished, but lesser outlawry was the penalty if witnesses to it could be brought. But few winters later this heathendom was abolished like the rest.

This which came to pass Teitr told us, how Christianity came to Iceland.)

2. Unclear factors in Ari's account

The above account by Ari the Wise is our chief source on the Conversion of Iceland, which is related in longer accounts in younger sources.[2] As *Íslendingabók* is a unique source (see above Ch. V.1) and Ari the Wise an extraordinary historian (above Ch. V.1) I shall try to explain his text, citing other sources when need arises. I shall also trace the opinions of Ari's account given by other writers and scholars.

The following issues raised by the account in *Íslendingabók* need clarification:

[2] *Odd's Ólafssaga* 1932, 126 ff. ASB 11, 36 ff. *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 188 ff. ÍF XII, 269–72.

(1) How was a battle avoided when the Christians rode to Þingvellir?
(2) What does Ari mean by the *erindi* of Gizurr and Hjalti?
(3) Why did the Christians and pagans declare themselves out of law with each other?
(4) What arrangement did Síðu-Hallr and Þorgeir the Lawspeaker come to?
(5) For what reason did Þorgeir lie down and cover himself with a cloak and why did he lie there so long?
(6) What did people expect of Þorgeir when they agreed to abide his decision?
(7) Why did the pagans accept Þorgeir's decision?

These issues will be dealt with one by one in the following chapters and an attempt made to answer the questions raised as far as the sources and scholarly research allow us.

Résumé

In *Íslendingabók* Ari gives a succinct account of the course of events leading to the Conversion of Iceland. He describes the arrival of Gizurr and Hjalti from Norway, the gathering of Christians at Vellankatla, their ride to Þingvellir and the pagan reaction which almost resulted in a battle. The following day Gizurr and Hjalti were allowed to deliver a speech at the Lawrock, whereupon the Christians and pagans declared themselves out of law with each other. The Christians then chose Síðu-Hallr to be their lawgiver but he acquitted himself by entrusting the task to Þorgeir the Lawspeaker, who lay down under a cloak in his booth not arising till the next day. Then he addressed the Assembly at the Lawrock, stressing the importance of joint laws and one faith, and persuaded people to vow to keep the laws that he was going to pronounce. Then it became law that all men should be Christian, but the old laws still applied to the exposure of infants and the eating of horse-meat, and sacrifices could be offered in secret.

VIII. It came so near to fighting . . .

1. The explanation offered by Theodoricus and *Ól.Tr.m.*

Ari does not give us any hint as to how a battle was avoided when the Christians rode to Þingvellir, but already in the 12th century people must have been puzzled by this. Theodoricus's account is evidence of this. He probably based it on Icelandic informants as far as he could (see above Ch. V.2). Theodoricus writes: *Cernens igitur multitudo paganorum illos advenisse, occurrit plebs universa ad arma, volentes eos unanimiter vita privare; sed ita sunt divinitus coerciti, ut minima manu christianorum eis obsistente nec possent nec auderent quicquam eis adversi inferre.*[1] (When the multitude of the heathens saw them approaching, all the crowd took up arms and were unanimous in their intent to take their lives; but they were disciplined by divine influence in such a way that, although the body of Christians opposing them was very small, they neither could nor dared do them harm.)

In *Ól.Tr.m.* a similar explanation is offered: *En með Guðs miskunn skaut heiðingjum skelk í bringu, ok þorðu eigi á at ráða.*[2] (But by the grace of God the heathens took fright and dared not attack.)

Both these explanations show that the authors did not know why events took this turn and therefore resorted to a supernatural explanation. And there is such resemblance between these two accounts that a link is clearly indicated. As traced above (Ch. V.4) *Odd's Ólafssaga* is influenced by Theodoricus's work, since the former was a source for Gunnlaug's "*Ólafssaga*".[3] One must therefore conclude that the above observation in *Ól.Tr.m.* stems from Gunnlaugr and that he got it almost straight from Tehodoricus. It is in accordance with other abridgements of Gunnlaug's work[4] that the author of *Kristni saga* should drop this observation, replacing it by the following which may simply be the product of the author's common sense: *en þó váru þeir sumir, er skirra vildu vandræðum, þó at eigi væri kristnir*[5] (but still there were some who wanted to prevent trouble even

[1] Storm 1880, 21. As Björn M. Ólsen has pointed out (Ólsen 1900, 89 and note 1) Theodoricus must be wrong when he says that the body of Christians was very small.
[2] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 189.
[3] Aðalbjarnarson 1937, 73 f. Halldórsson in KL XII 1967, 551.
[4] Ólsen 1893, 276 ff. See further above Ch. V.4 and notes 28–30.
[5] ASB 11, 38.

though they were not Christian). The author of *Kristni saga* may well be correct in this assumption but it does not suffice to explain why events took such a sudden and unexpected turn.

2. News of King Óláf's hostages

In his *Íslendinga saga* Jón Jóhannesson points out three issues which may be used to explain how a battle was avoided at the General Assembly, but he admits that the true reason may well be lost to us. Firstly, the Christians turned out to be more numerous than expected; secondly, there were people of both sides who did their utmost to keep the peace; and thirdly, people now received news of the hostages kept in Norway by King Óláfr and this caused many of their relatives to have second thoughts.[6]

Ari does not mention the hostages, but in *Kristni saga, Ól.Tr.m.* and *Odd's Ólafssaga* it is reported that when Gizurr and Hjalti promised King Óláfr Tryggvason to further the faith, the Icelanders who had been arrested were released from custody with four exceptions, one chieftain's son from each quarter. They were to be held as hostages until such time as Óláfr Tryggvason heard the results of the mission of Gizurr and Hjalti, and the fate of the hostages depended on it.[7]

Jóhannesson is right when he concludes that the news of the hostages may have given their relatives cold feet, but it is more questionable whether the pagans received this news on that very occasion. In *Ól.Tr.m.* and *Kristni saga* there is a passage which does not appear in the other works. It includes the noteworthy statement that the same day as Flosi Þórðarson rode over Arnarstakksheiði on his way to the General Assembly, Gizurr and Hjalti were off Dyrhólmaós en route for Iceland. From men who had rowed out to Gizurr and Hjalti Flosi got to hear everything about their mission and about the hostages taken by King Óláfr, one of whom was Flosi's brother. Flosi is reputed to have carried this news to the Assembly.[8]

This account is worthy of credit in the form in which it appears. The main reason for trusting it is the unusual nature of the circumstances which a scribe is unlikely to have invented. This story can possibly be traced to the work of monk Gunnlaugr from about the year 1200.[9] If the news were brought by Flosi (or someone else), everyone at the Assembly would have known about Gizurr and Hjalti's mission one or two days before they arrived at the Assembly. If we want to argue that the news of the hostages caused the pagans to retreat and sheathe their swords, we must first show

[6] Jóhannesson 1956, 161 f.
[7] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 165. ASB 11, 35. *Odd's Ólafssaga* 1932, 127.
[8] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 188. ASB 11, 37.
[9] See above Ch. V.4.

that the above mentioned story in *Kristni saga* and *Ól.Tr.m.* is fiction.

Later Jóhannesson wrote an article on the same subject in which he abandoned the hypothesis that the news of the hostages prevented fighting. He emphasizes the first two issues but also suggests that friends and relatives of the hostages may have been among those who wanted a peaceful settlement.[10]

3. The answer sought in the *erindi* of Gizurr and Hjalti

It is probable, as suggested by the author of *Kristni saga* and Jóhannesson, that there were men on both sides who wanted a peaceful solution. But it may be difficult to judge the influence yielded by such men since it must have varied with the circumstances. The third suggestion of Jóhennesson that the Christian party turned out to be bigger than expected is quite reasonable. At least we must assume that the Christians were so numerous by this time that they had some hope of victory in a pitched battle. Otherwise they would hardly have proceeded so recklessly. I find it natural to look upon the Christian advance on Þingvellir as a direct follow-on from their opposition to the conviction and sentencing of Hjalti at the Assembly the previous year (see above Ch. VI.13), when they tried but failed to prevent the court from proceeding with the case. It seems that now, a year later, they had become more powerful and could contemplate a battle with some confidence.

The above observation leads me to conclude that there is as yet no definite answer as to why fighting was avoided. The size of the Christian party, the concern for the hostages and the number of people who wanted to bury the hatchet may all have played a part in this. But the main reason why there was no fighting must, I think, be connected with Ari's statement that on the next day Gizurr and Hjalti went to Lǫgberg and there voiced their errand.

Résumé

Ari the Wise does not state what prevented fighting when the Christians advanced on Þingvellir. Theodoricus attributes it to a miracle and this explanation is adopted in *Ól.Tr.m.* It has been suggested that news of King Óláf's hostages turned the scales but there is evidence that this news had reached the Assembly before the Christian party. Still, this may have made the relatives of the hostages more irresolute. The Christians were probably fairly powerful and it is likely that there were men of both parties who wanted compromise. The main reason why a battle was avoided is probably to be connected with Gizurr and Hjalti being allowed to address the General Assembly the next day.

[10] Jóhannesson 1958, 135.

IX. The *erindi* of Gizurr and Hjalti

1. The optimism of Gizurr and Hjalti

It is not easy to account for Gizurr and Hjalti's optimism when they undertook to convert Iceland for Óláfr Tryggvason.[1] According to *Íslendingabók* they, *hétu hónum umbsýslu sinni til á nýjaleik, at hér yrði enn við kristninni tekit, ok létu eigi annars ván, en þar mundi hlýða,*[2] (promised to attempt once more to get Christianity accepted and said they fully expected to succeed). This shows strange optimism bearing in mind the conditions that had probably prevailed at the previous Althing. It is possible that the account of this is based on the outcome of the events, for Gizurr and Hjalti could well make the most of their undertaking in retrospect.

2. A lesser outlaw speaking at Lǫgberg

According to Ari, Hjalti stayed behind in Laugardalr, because he had been made a lesser outlaw the summer before. It was a sensible arrangement that a convicted outlaw should keep away from the Assembly. But according to Ari, the next thing that happens is that Hjalti and those who had stayed behind with him meet Gizurr and the other Christians before they leave Vellankatla and Hjalti rides with them to Þingvellir. There is no reason given for this, we are not told whether Hjalti was sent for or whether he himself decided to go to the Assembly. And Ari finds it unnecessary to explain in any way how it came about that Hjalti, a convicted outlaw, was allowed to address the Assembly at the Lawrock.

Jóhannesson has pointed out what a defiance the Christian advance on the Assembly grounds must have constituted, not least with a convict in their ranks.[3] It therefore comes as a surprise that, when the swords had been sheathed, this convict should be allowed to speak at the Lawrock. There is no explanation for this but it is possible that the parties were so evenly matched that the Christians could get away with such an outrage.

[1] See above Ch. VI.2 and further Jóhannesson 1956, 159.
[2] ÍF I, 15.
[3] Jóhannesson 1956, 161.

3. *báru upp erindi sín* (revealed their messages?)

From the account in *Íslendingabók* it is clear that Gizurr and Hjalti were allowed to be present at the General Assembly and argue their case. But what case were they arguing? It is not likely that the heathens postponed battle and allowed the spokesmen of Christianity to address the Assembly, if all they were doing was to urge the heathens to accept Christianity. In all likelihood they delivered another, more worldly message even though the sources are silent about it. It is not obvious what Ari's phrase *báru þar upp erindi sín* includes. It might only mean "made their speeches", but most likely it means "revealed their messages", and implies that they had more than one message to deliver. Thus it seems likely that something more than the acceptance of Christianity was mentioned, although that must have been the central point.

Résumé

Ari has Gizurr and Hjalti display extraordinary optimism when they inform King Óláfr that they will probably be able to convert Icelanders to Christianity. Here the narrative may be affected by the outcome of events.

It is strange that an outlaw was given leave to speak at the Lawrock. Did the Christians resort to force to enable Hjalti to speak?

It is still a mystery what messages Gizurr and Hjalti delivered at the Lawrock but it is likely that they were not only spokesmen of Christianity but also worldly messengers of King Óláfr even though this is not overtly stated in the sources.

X. Said themselves out of law with the others

1. The significance of the laws

It is thought that the constitution of the Icelandic Commonwealth stems from 930.[1] Its characteristic feature was decentralization, authority being from the first vested in the hands of 36 *goðar* who lived spread out all round the country. They sat in the legislature at the General Assembly,[2] appointed judges both at the Assembly court and the district courts,[3] and they carried out sentences together with the plaintiffs.[4]

Near the year 965 the constitution was altered, the amendment being attributed to Þórðr gellir. The country was then divided into four Quarters and the number of *goðar* fixed on the basis of three assemblies in each quarter, but four in the Northern, and three *goðar* in each assembly. After this alteration the total number of *goðar* was thus 39.[5] To match the Northern Quarter, *goðar* from the other Quarters selected 3 men from each to sit in the central legislature, which then consisted of 48 men, 12 from each Quarter.[6] These 48 *goðar* constituted the legislative body at the Assembly and 3 out of every 4 of them could appoint judges.[7]

The lawspeaker was the only official of the Icelandic state in the 10th century. He was elected by the Legislative Council for a term of 3 years. He was a member of the Legislature, presided at its meetings and had the right to vote. The lawspeaker knew the laws by heart, and proclaimed them at the Assembly, i.e. he recited them aloud, and he was to have recited all the existing laws in 3 years. He was obliged to say how the law stood in any given matter when called upon to do so at the Assembly or elsewhere.[8]

The importance of law in the old Icelandic Commonwealth is shown e.g. by the statutes which have been preserved, which are much more copious than those of many other nations at comparable stages of development.[9]

[1] ÍF I, 9. Jóhannesson 1956, 58 f. Lárusson in KL V 1960, 363–6.
[2] *Grágás* I, 211 ff. Lárusson 1958, 78 ff.
[3] *Grágás* I, 38. The opinion has been offered that the *goðar* themselves were in charge of the judicature at the Assembly from the first, but more scholars favour the opinion that the judicature and legislature were distinct from the beginning. Lárusson 1958, 78. Strömbäck 1975, 27 and note 2 and references.
[4] *Grágás* I, 84.
[5] ÍF I, 12.
[6] *Grágás* I, 211. Lárusson 1958, 78.
[7] *Grágás* I, 38; 211. Lárusson 1958, 81.
[8] *Grágás* I, 208 ff.; 216 f.
[9] Lárusson in KL V 1960, 411. Lárusson 1958, 131.

The Icelanders appear often to have resorted to legislation to solve fresh problems. The laws concerning the disgrace to the family, the "*frændaskǫmm*" legislation (see above Ch. VI.10–11), shows this.

2. A religious or political matter

There must have been something explosive in the speeches of Gizurr and Hjalti or others who spoke at Lǫgberg. What it was will remain a mystery; we do not even know if it was a religious or political matter which was at the bottom of it all. But this does not really matter for religion and public affairs were so entwined in the heathen society that those who renounced their faith were deprived of participation in public affairs.[10] During the years of missionary activity it had happened that the men who were converted to Christianity no longer participated in upholding laws in the country. And if *goðar* were baptized, they were expelled from their office and cut off from the heathen constitution. They could not take part in hallowing ceremonies, sacrificial feasts or other rites that formed the basis of the heathen constitution in Northern countries.[11] It was therefore hardly a novelty for Christians to "say themselves out of law", i.e. renounce the community of laws. But to renounce it formally with witnesses was a novelty. In so doing the Christians were turning abstention into prohibition and emphasizing that they did not belong within the framework of heathen society.

The reason for the Christians there and then to renounce the laws may have been that they were now so numerous that they felt themselves capable of founding a new state in the country side by side with the heathen state. It is also feasible that the Christians expected support from King Óláfr Tryggvason to make it possible for them to withstand pressure from the heathen majority. This we can ponder, but all discussion about the real reason for the action of the Christians can only be guesswork for the sources reveal absolutely nothing of the verbal exchange between Christians and heathens which led to this decision.

3. A mass proscription of Christians?

But it was not only the Christians who renounced the community of laws; the heathens too named witnesses and did the same. This part of Ari's account is less comprehensible, for it is even more difficult to understand why this was necessary. The Christians were really already beyond the pale of the laws and what then could be the reason for the heathens, who com-

[10] See Ch. III.1 and note 22.
[11] See Strömbäck 1975, 38 ff and references.

manded a majority and governed the country, to feel it necessary to renounce the community of laws? The sources give us no reply, but a probable explanation is, that this was the only way for the heathens to make a mass proscription of Christians. Otherwise they would have had to prosecute them individually. One may assume that Gizurr and Hjalti had made some deal with King Óláfr Tryggvason which the heathens considered treason and which they were determined to denounce. But here too the sources remain mute and unsupported assumptions are dangerous. This gives food for thought but the fact remains that both Christians and heathens renounced the community of laws, *ok gingu síðan frá lǫgbergi* (and then left Lǫgberg) according to Ari's modest account.

The temporary peace which the armistice the previous day had brought about was now over. Instead the country was faced with the most serious split ever, as far as can be judged by our sources, and this in a country where the laws seem to have played a more important role than in most other places. At that moment it looked as if two separate states with different religions might be born in the country. In the following chapters we shall attempt to find out how this was avoided.

Résumé

The legislature of Icelandic Commonwealth was vested in the hands of the lawspeaker and 48 *goðar* with equal representation from all parts of the country. 36 of these appointed judges at the General Assembly. Execution of judgement was discharged by the *goðar* and the plaintiffs. The lawspeaker learnt the legal statutes by heart, interpreted the laws and proclaimed the laws over a period of 3 years. The laws appear to have enjoyed significant respect in Iceland already in the 10th century and sometimes new problems were solved by new legislation.

It is not clear whether the renunciation of the community of laws was due to religious or political differences, probably both. The Christians appear to have felt capable of founding their own state. Maybe they were expecting the support of King Óláfr Tryggvason.

It might be an explanation of why the pagans renounced the community of laws with the Christians that this was the only way for the heathens to make a mass proscription of the Christians.

This split meant an end to peace and a serious dispute for this law-respecting nation. The Commonwealth was on the verge of collapse, when events took yet a new course.

XI. Síðu-Hallr

1. What is known about Síðu-Hallr

The importance of the role of Síðu-Hallr in the introduction of Christianity cannot be overestimated. Evidence was presented earlier concerning the part he must have played in Thangbrand's mission (above Ch. VI.5) and the faith the Christians had in this old goði showed itself when they chose him as their lawspeaker after declaring themselves out of law with the heathens. Síðu-Hallr accepted this responsibility of leading and representing the Christians, but it appears that he had no desire to be the future lawspeaker. *Íslendingabók* says about this: "Then the Christian men asked Síðu-Hallr to say the laws which should go with Christianity; but he got clear of this by feeing Þorgeir the Lawspeaker that he should say them, and he was still a heathen" (above Ch. VIII.1).

Ari the Wise is here as laconic as ever and these words have been interpreted in various ways. In *Ól.Tr.m.* it says that Hallr made three stipulations regarding the law to Þorgeir: that all his countrymen became Christians; temples and idols should be sacrosant; and that sacrifices performed before witnesses should carry the penalty of lesser outlawry.[1]

In recent times scholars have thought along similar lines. So, Konrad Maurer expresses the opinion that Þorgeir the Lawspeaker was informed by Síðu-Hallr that it was an absolute condition for agreement on the part of the Christians that they should not have to retreat from their demands.[2] And Björn M. Ólsen says that Síðu-Hallr must have negotiated an agreement with Þorgeir on the basis that all their countrymen joined in agreement under the banner of Christianity and the old constitution.[3] Several scholars have taken a similar stand on the subject.[4] As this departs a great deal from Ari's account we must give the matter more consideration. First attention must be directed to all that is known about Síðu-Hallr to discover whether we can throw some light upon his intentions in refusing the task of declaring the law; second, we must try to determine what the exchanges between Síðu-Hallr and Þorgeir signified.

[1] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 191.
[2] Maurer I 1855, 440 f.
[3] Ólsen 1900, 97 ff.
[4] Helgason 1925, 31. Jóhannesson 1956, 163. Lindal 1974, 246.

Síðu-Hall's lineage is traced in *Landnámabók*, S and H. His father was Þorsteinn, son of Bǫðvar the settler. His lineage derives directly from kings and three of them are named.[5] Síðu-Hall's mother was Þórdís, daughter of Özurr keiliselgr son of Hrollaugr the settler, son of Earl Rǫgnvaldr of Møre.[6] Síðu-Hallr was thus of noble family and both his grandfathers are numbered with the main chieftains in the country about the year 930.[7]

2. The slaying of Ljótr son of Síðu-Hallr

Three Icelandic annals, Resensannal, Hinrik Høyers annal and Skálholtsannal, mention that Ljótr son of Síðu-Hallr was slain at Þingvellir in the year 1011.[8] Resensannal covers a period up to the end of 13th century in its present form[9] so it must have been concluded before the year 1300. Høyers annal is thought to be from about the same time as Resensannal, extending to the year 1310 and being of similar content.[10] Skálholtsannal covers the years 140—1362 and is preserved in a manuscript which is considered written soon after the year 1362.[11]

Barði Guðmundsson has written an essay in which he deals with Icelandic events referred to in old Icelandic annals. He has grouped them according to regions and traced them to probable informants.[12] Guðmundsson argues that about half the events mentioned in the annals must have been known to Þuríðr Snorradóttir who was an informant of Ari the Wise[13] (see above Ch.V.1). Guðmundsson picks out 7 items which he argues are based on dates stemming from legends relating to the clan of Gellir Þorkelsson, Ari's grandfather.[14] Guðmundsson also mentions 14 events from the North and East regions, occurring in close proximity to Jórunn Einarsdóttir, who was Þuríðr Snorradóttir's aunt on the mother side. One of these events is the slaying of Ljótr son of Síðu-Hallr—Ljótr was Jórunn's brother-in-law.[15] According to Guðmundsson's essay, other Icelandic events from the old Icelandic annals are based on Íslendingabók.[16] Guðmundsson's argument is most interesting.

[5] ÍF I, 310 f.
[6] ÍF I, 316 f.
[7] ÍF I, 397.
[8] Storm 1888, 16; 57; 179.
[9] Benediktsson in KL XIV 1969, 79 and references.
[10] Benediktsson in KL VII 1962, 320 ff. and references.
[11] Benediktsson in KL XV 1970, 390 f. and references.
[12] Guðmundsson 1959, 29 ff.
[13] Guðmundsson 1959, 29.
[14] Guðmundsson 1959, 31.
[15] Guðmundsson 1959, 32 f.
[16] Guðmundsson 1959, 36 ff.

In Resensannal and Høyers annal the only mention of the year 1011 is: *Víg Ljóts Hallssonar*[17] (The slaying of Ljótr Hallsson). Skálholtsannal on the other hand says: *1011: Bardagi á alþingi. Víg Ljóts Síðu-Hallssonar*[18] (1011: Battle at the Althing. Slaying of Ljótr son of Síðu-Hallr). Lögmannsannal extending to the year 1392,[19] and Oddaverjaannal which is thought to be from the end of the 15th century,[20] mention the battle of Þingvellir in 1011 but do not mention the slaying of Ljótr.[21]

The battle of Þingvellir must have been a more noteworthy event than the killing of one man in that battle. Therefore it is strange that Ljót's slaying should have been the only event entered in the oldest annals in that connection. If Barði Guðmundsson's theory is correct this may be due to the kinship between Ljótr and the informant, but it is hardly in itself sufficient reason for the slaying of one young man to be entered in annals as one of the main events in the whole country. There must be more to it than that.

In *Njáls saga* there is a report of Síðu-Hall's action after the death of Ljótr. To reach a reconciliation Síðu-Hallr is said to have been willing to forego any compensation for his son and still offer his opponents truce and peace.[22] In the story it is then described how the settlement was made and men left the General Assembly. Then Síðu-Hall's affairs are referred to again and it is told that the Assembly collected money to give him in atonement and it came to no less than 8 hundred in silver which was four times the usual wergild amount.[23]

The source-value of *Njáls saga* was discussed earlier (above Ch. V.6), and the account of Síðu-Hallr is doubtless stamped with the genius of the man who wrote the saga. But this in no way makes it impossible that it retains an historical core. Einar Ól. Sveinsson has shown that the history in *Njáls saga* is most accurate with reference to the southeast of Iceland.[24] He believes that the author must have based his work on two texts written in those parts, an "*Ættartǫlurit*" and a "*Kristni þáttr*" (see above Ch. V.6), and got his history of the area from these, especially from "*Ættartǫlurit*".[25] In a recent work Lars Lönnroth on the other hand thinks it is also possible—and indeed more likely—that the pedigrees in *Njáls saga* represent the author's own learning.[26] From these written sources or his own learning

[17] Storm 1888, 16; 57.
[18] Storm 1888, 179.
[19] Lárusson in KL XI 1966, 135 f. and references.
[20] Benediktsson in KL XII 1967, 492 f. and references.
[21] Storm 1888, 249; 468.
[22] ÍF XII, 411 f.
[23] ÍF XII, 414.
[24] Sveinsson 1933, 277 f.
[25] Sveinsson 1933, 67 ff.; 71; 78; 86 ff.; 98; 271 f.; 278. See above Ch. V.6.
[26] Lönnroth 1976, 237.

and traditions from the South the author most likely took his information about Síðu-Hallr, which might give the account in *Njáls saga* added historical value. The account in *Njáls saga* of the battle at the General Assembly, which Sveinsson guesses is from "*Ættartǫlurit*",[27] shows in my opinion in various ways that it was adapted from a written source. It is especially noteworhty how the thread is taken up again when the author talks about the compensation for Síðu-Hall's son, Ljótr, long after this matter has been passed by in the saga.[28] It is most probable that, though the incident was momentarily forgotten, the author wished to include it, however late it might appear.

The killing of Ljótr Síðu-Hallsson must be a historical fact and to my opinion it must also be a historical fact that for the sake of reconciliation Síðu-Hallr renounced his claim to compensation for his son and pledged faith and peace for his opponents. It is precisely this response of Síðu-Hallr which brought it about that the killing of Ljótr became so memorable an event that in the oldest annals it appears as the only specific incident recorded from the battle at the General Assembly. A significant point to bear in mind here is that many learned men in the 11th and 12th centuries traced their families back to Síðu-Hallr.[29] Accounts about him stood a particularily good chance of preservation without distortion.

Besides the works mentioned here, Síðu-Hallr is mentioned in *Þiðranda þáttr ok Þórhalls* where he is described in much the same way as in *Njáls saga*.[30] In *Íslendingadrápa*, a poem about heroes of the saga period, the author, Haukr Valdísarson, devotes one verse to Síðu-Hallr, saying that he could match anyone and had famous sons.[31] Jónas Kristjánsson has recently studied this poem closely and argued convincingly that it was composed before the first of the *Íslendingasögur*, and in all probability in the twelfth century.[32]

[27] Sveinsson 1933, 278.

[28] ÍF XII, 414.

[29] ÍF I, 318 where we read: "Síðu-Hallr was married to Jóreiðr Þiðrandadóttir. Their son was Þorsteinn, the father of Magnús, father of Einar, father of Bishop Magnús. Another son of Hallr was Egill, the father of Þorgerðr, the mother of the blessed Bishop Jón. Þorvarðr Hallsson was the father of Þórdís, the mother of Jórunn, the mother of Rev. Hallr, the father of Bishop Magnús. Yngvildr, the daughter of Hallr, was the mother of Þórey, the mother of Rev. Sæmundr the Wise. Þorsteinn Hallsson was the father of Gyðríðr, the mother of Jóreiðr, the mother of Rev. Ari the Wise. Þorgerðr Hallsdóttir was the mother of Yngvildr, the mother of Ljótr, the father of Járngerðr, the mother of Valgerðr, the mother of Bǫðvar, the father of Guðný, the mother of the sons of Sturla."

[30] *Þiðranda þáttr ok Þórhalls*, 273 ff.

[31] Skj. A I, 559. B I, 554.

[32] Kristjánsson 1975, 90. See further Einarsson in KL VII 1962, 495 f. and references.

3. What was Síðu-Hall's intention?

A little more than ten years separate the events in *Íslendingabók* and *Njáls saga* regarding Síðu-Hallr. The account in *Njáls saga* is more detailed as it gives a fuller description of Síðu-Hallr which is not to be found in *Íslendingabók*. If my argument is correct that *Njáls saga* contains an historical core on this point it seems to me that the reactions of Síðu-Hallr in the year 1011 are important in every consideration of what determined his standpoint when the task of declaring the law for the Christians was entrusted to him. From what we now feel we know of Síðu-Hallr, we must incline to the opinion that his first response was to extend the hand of reconciliation in order to avert hazardous developments and bloodshed. He could not have acted in such a way without the consent of the Christians who had chosen him as lawspeaker. But what was Síðu-Hall's intention when he declined the task and offered it to Þorgeir? Is he not moderating the demands of the Christians in order to ensure peace? Had he not persuaded his allies to return to the heathen constitution and conform to the customs for a while in order to ensure a more peaceful opportunity to further the progress of Christinaity. At the same time, of course, he must have demanded of Þorgeir that it be made more tolerable for the Christians to live within the bounds of heathen society; they were granted security and some privileges.

This interpretation of the standpoint of Síðu-Hallr is dervied from what is known about him from other sources than *Íslendingabók*. But it also accords well with Ari the Wise's account of events. He says only that Síðu-Hallr would not assume the responsibility of acting as lawspeaker to the Christians and persuaded Þorgeir, who was then heathen, to declare law for the Christians. The Christians were in all likelihood greatly outnumbered at the Assembly when this happened (see nevertheless above Ch. VI.13 and VIII.3). It is inconceivable that Síðu-Hallr could have dictated terms to Þorgeir as we are given to understand in some of the younger sources.[33] We must also remember that the conjectures about the agreement between Síðu-Hallr and Þorgeir exist in thin air. Had Síðu-Hallr sought an agreement with Þorgeir on the grounds that all his compatriots should join in harmony under the banner of Christianity and the old constitution, as Björn M. Ólsen supposes, and also took advice from men in both parties,[34] we should expect Ari to mention such an agreement since it would have been central to the events at the Assembly. The man who would gain most honour from such an agreement would of course have been Síðu-Hallr, and Ari was a fourth-generation descendant of his (see Ch. XI.2 above note 29).

[33] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 191.
[34] Ólsen 1900, 97 ff.

Everything suggests that Ari would have known about the agreement and would certainly have reported it if it ever existed. But Ari makes no reference to any such agreement, and it can be considered out of the question that there ever was one.

4. The deal between Síðu-Hallr and Þorgeir

Ari's words, *keypti at Þorgeiri lǫgsǫgumanni, at hann skyldi upp segja* (paid a fee to Þorgeir the Lawspeaker that he should say them) have caused considerable speculation among scholars. Björn M. Ólsen was of the opinion that this was a lawspeaker's fee, which Síðu-Hallr paid Þorgeir for declaring the law, but not a bribe.[35] Dag Strömbäck, on the contrary, considers it likely that Síðu-Hallr gave Þorgeir money to influence his decision.[36] In this connection he refers to the words of *Odd's Ólafssaga* where it says that King Óláfr gave a great sum of money to Gizurr and Hjalti with which to ingratiate themselves with the chieftains (*at vingask við høfðingja*).[37] Bo Almqvist definitely thinks that Síðu-Hallr appears to have bribed Þorgeir even though the sources are not clear on this point, as he puts it.[38] This requires careful consideration.

Money given to the lawspeaker could of course influence him and the laws he had to declare. But it was not enough to gain the support of the lawspeaker. His decision had to receive a majority approval of the pagan goðis in the central body of the legislature[39] and they could not possibly be easier to deal with after the lawspeaker had been bribed. Bo Almqvist has correctly pointed out the unique position of the Icelandic missionaries who found that it was of little use to gain the support of single chieftains for it was in no way certain that their followers would go along with them.[40] In the same way the lawspeaker was in no way the appointed leader of other goðis at the Althing. They had to be persuaded personally until the necessary majority was gained, if a motion was to be passed. For this reason I think it rather improbable that Síðu-Hallr gave Þorgeir money to gain his support.

Jón Jóhannesson believes that the phrase *keypti at Þorgeiri* means simply "agreed with Þorgeir"[41] and I favour this explanation. Most likely Síðu-Hallr paid Þorgeir a fee for declaring the law. But the conjectures of the

[35] Ólsen 1900, 86 note 1 and references.
[36] Strömbäck 1975, 30 f.
[37] *Odd's Ólafssaga* 1932, 128. Strömbäck 1975, 30 f.
[38] Almqvist 1974, 19.
[39] *Grágás* I, 215. Lárusson 1958, 79 f.
[40] Almqvist 1974, 24.
[41] Jóhannesson 1956, 163.

sources about the reason for the payment (see above Ch. XI.4 and note 35) show that they have no sound tradition to build on.

5. The laws which should go with Christianity

It is most probable that when Ari says *skyldi upp segja*, he is referring only to declaring the laws which should go with Christianity; it seems most natural to interpret the sentence in this way. In that case the agreement between Síðu-Hallr and Þorgeir covered only the special laws of the Christians, and it may be that *Ól.Tr.m.* is based on an old tradition when it reports that the Christians made some stipulations as to the contents of the laws, if they were left to Þorgeir to formulate and announce.[42] But the agreement between Síðu-Hallr and Þorgeir seems in my opinion not to have concerned the general legislation, and the law of the heathens probably did not enter the discussion. There is no reason to call into question the implication that these two conversed alone. Síðu-Hallr was authorized by his allies to treat with Þorgeir about the announcement of the laws for the Christians and Þorgeir did not need to consult his colleagues to assume the responsibility. In all likelihood this was a matter which concerned only the Christians and the Lawspeaker.

Kristni saga states that Síðu-Hallr paid a fee to Þorgeir *at hann segði upp lǫg hvártveggi, kristin ok heiðin*[43] (that he declared the laws for both Christians and heathens), and this could suggest a tradition to the effect that Þorgeir was to declare separate laws for both parties.

All the evidence seems to indicate that persuaded by Síðu-Hallr the Christians had relaxed their demands and consented to remain within the heathen constitution for the present. They probably demanded that peace and stability were guaranteed and some arrangement to allow them to practise their faith without penalty.

A great responsibility was laid on the shoulders of Þorgeir the Lawsepaker to settle the affair in such a way that both heathens and Christians would be content with the final decision. Þorgeir did not call a meeting to discuss the difficult matter which he had to solve. By himself in private he prepared himself to tackle the problem and find the solution which would be agreeable to all. The following chapters will examine more closely Þorgeir and his conduct.

[42] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 191. See further above Ch. XI.1.
[43] ASB 11, 39.

Résumé

Síðu-Hallr played an important role in connection with the conversion of the country and to understand the course of events it is important to realize why he got Þorgeir to declare the law, a task which he had been saddled with. Some scholars think that Síðu-Hallr laid down certain conditions for Þorgeir. As ari does not mention this, I attempt to clarify Síðu-Hall's motives in the light of other sources.

Síðu-Hallr belonged to a noble and powerful family. According to reliable sources his son was killed at Þingvellir in 1011, 11 or 12 years after the Conversion. A fairly late source is very possibly correct in stating that Síðu-Hallr offered to forego compensation for his son so as to bring about conciliation and that he also offered his opponents peace and security. Other sources paint a similar picture of Síðu-Hall's noble character. Many of the main chieftains of the 12th and 13th centuries were descended from Síðu-Hallr so that stories about him stood a good chance of being preserved.

From what is known about Síðu-Hallr outside *Íslendingabók* it is likely that he may have been the first to extend a conciliatory hand at the Althing. This theory also accords well with Ari's description of the course of events. He would in all probability have mentioned it if the solution at the Althing was based on a deal between Síðu-Hallr and Þorgeir.

It is unlikely that Síðu-Hallr gave Þorgeir money to gain his support for it was not enough to have the backing of the Lawspeaker. A majority of the central body of the legislature was required and the goðis would not have proved more pliable after the Lawspeaker had been bribed. Most likely Síðu-Hallr simply agreed with Þorgeir that he should declare separate laws for the Christians in the country.

By this agreement Þorgeir shouldered a grave responsibility and he sought solitude so as to be able to discharge his task. We shall now turn to Þorgeir and his task.

XII. Þorgeir the Lawspeaker

1. Sources on Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði

In *Íslendingabók* Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði is naturally included in the calender of lawspeakers. There it says that he held the office for 17 years, from 985 to 1002.[1]

Þorgeir's lineage is traced in *Landnámabók*, S and H. They both have it that he is the son of Þorkell leifr inn háva,[2] but disagree about whose son Þorkell is. H says that Þorkell was the son of Þorfinnr máni, a settler, the son of Áskell Tjǫrvi. S says that Þorkell was the son of Þórir settler, the son of Grímr gráfeldarmúli of Rogaland.[3] Jakob Benediktsson thinks it is likely that the lineage of H is closer to the truth and that in S it was inserted in the wrong place.[4] In *Njáls saga* Þorgeir is said to be son of Tjǫrvi, son of Þorkell langr, but it does not trace his lineage any further.[5] Þorgeir's mother was Þórunn daughter of Ása daughter of Hrólfr rauðskeggr the settler.[6] The brother of this Ása was the above-mentioned Þorsteinn rauðnefr (see above Ch. II.7). In *Landnámabók* it says further that Þorgeir had three wives and in these marriages he had nine sons and one daughter. He also had two sons out of wedlock. One of them was Finni the dream-wise; his mother was Lekný, an alien, according to *Landnámabók*.[7]

Ljósvetninga saga tells of disputes between Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði and his sons with whom, according to the saga, he did not see eye to eye. Also mentioned there is the "second sight" of Finni Þorgeirsson.[8] *Ljósvetninga saga* is thought to have been written about 1260 or soon after and relates clan feuds in the Northeastern part of the country from about 990 to about 1066.[9] The saga is supposedly based on lineage records, oral traditions preserved in those parts until the story was written and also to

[1] ÍF I, 13.
[2] ÍF I, 275. *Íslendingabók* too says that Þorgeir was son of Þorkell (ÍF I, 13).
[3] ÍF I, 275 and note 8 and references. See further *Skarðsárbók* 1958, 125 f.
[4] ÍF I, 275 note 8 and references. See further Sigfússon in ÍF X, XXXII note 2 and references.
[5] ÍF XII, 270; 302.
[6] ÍF I, 274 where Hrólfr rauðskegg's daughter is called Æsa; 358.
[7] ÍF I, 275.
[8] ÍF X, 7 ff.
[9] Sigfússon in KL X 1965, 653 ff.

some extent on written stories.[10] Barði Guðmundsson has suggested that *Ljósvetninga saga* is a novel.[11] This theory has neither been proved nor disproved, but Björn Sigfússon does not find the argument convincing.[12] Sigfússon also thinks that genealogy in its widest sense, i.e. "personal history" (*mannfræði*), is the aspect of the story which has greatest historical validity.[13]

In *Finnboga saga* Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði is said to see that Finnbogi is not of the family he is alleged to belong to, but the son of Þorgeir's sister and his brother-in-law, whom he persuades to recognize Finnbogi as their son[14] (see Ch. XII.2 below). We are not told in the story how Þorgeir discovers this. In the same saga Finni Þorgeirsson and his famous gift of wisdom are mentioned. It says there that his mother, named Leikný in this source, was Finnish. The saga further says that Þorgeir prophesied that Finnbogi would be superior to other men.[15]

Finnboga saga is one of the youngest of all the Icelandic sagas, probably written early in the 14th century.[16] The hero, Finnbogi rammi (the strong), is mentioned with his nickname in the poem *Íslendingadrápa* (see above Ch.XI.2 and notes 31 and 32), and he is also mentioned in *Landnámabók*, S and H, in which he is said to be the grandson of Eyvindr who colonized Flateyjardalr[17] (see above Ch. II.7). In M a family is traced from Finnbogi.[18] *Finnboga saga* is a very one-sided description of Finnbogi's heroics, mixed with international legendary material and borrowed fiction and has therefore very limited source-value.[19] However, Sigurður Nordal does not exclude the possibility that there existed some tales of Finnbogi older than the saga but hardly a complete story.[20]

2. The information of the sources on Þorgeir

These views, taken from sources dealing with Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði, suggest that he was a powerful chieftain and goði, highly esteemed and peaceable by nature. His many years of office as lawspeaker bear witness to his accomplishments and the general confidence which he enjoyed. The

[10] Sigfússon in ÍF X 1940, XXIX f.
[11] Guðmundsson 1958, 92 ff.
[12] Sigfússon in KL X 1965, 655.
[13] Sigfússon in ÍF X 1940, XXX.
[14] ÍF XIV, 260 f.
[15] ÍF XIV, 269 f.
[16] Nordal 1953, 268. Sigfússon in KL IV 1959, 280 and references.
[17] ÍF I, 273.
[18] ÍF I, 273 note 6 and references. *Skarðsárbók* 1958, 124 and note 6–7.
[19] Sigfússon in KL IV 1959, 280 and references. Nordal 1953, 268.
[20] Nordal 1953, 268.

strife with his sons which most likely occurred in the last years of Þorgeir's life perhaps took place after the acceptance of Christianity—compare the words of Hǫskuldr Þorgeirsson: "*Vér skulum rjóða oss í goðablóði* at fornum sið"[21] ("Let us smear goði-blood on us as of old")—but of course no definite conclusion can be drawn. It is not quite clear what *goðablóð* means, but the story has it that Hǫskuldr slaughtered a ram and smeared his hands in its blood so as to sanctify his office of goði.[22] Björn Sigfússon is of the opinion that this was some sort of goði-inauguration as Hǫskuldr was not previously a holder of that office.[23]

An account from the 19th century maintains that Þorgeir threw heathen idols into Goðafoss when he came home from the General Assembly where Christianity was accepted by law.[24] The historical value of this account is not great and it can be considered no more than an attempt to interpret the name Goðafoss. But it reminds us of what is said of Þorgeir's great-uncle, the prescient sacrificer, Þorsteinn rauðnefr, who had all left-overs thrown into the waterfall (see above Ch. II.7). The sources are silent about how great a sacrificer Þorgeir was and his power of foresight is only mentioned in one place, and then only coursorly (see above Ch. XII.1). On the other hand, he is related to staunch heathens and soothsayers, and his son, Finni, is considered to have had a great gift of prophesy. Finni's extraction on his mother's side is worth attention. As mentioned earlier (Ch. XII.1 above) *Landnámabók* says that Lekný, whose name is not attested elsewhere, was foreign without specifying nationality but in *Finnboga saga* it says that Finni's mother, there named Leikný, was Finnish (above Ch. XII.1). Leikný is explained as "young and active" in Icelandic name explanations.[25] It might possibly be akin to the name of the giantess Leikn[26] or the word *leikni* which means "witchkraft".[27] But the most plausible derivation of Le(i)kný seems to me to be from Finnish *Lenki* meaning "girl", which is also used as a proper name.[28] What it says about the nationality of the woman in *Finnboga saga* would then be correct, and it would also explain why the name did not become more widespread. The Finnish maternal extraction of Finni also provides adequate explanation of his gift of wisdom and skill in interpreting dreams since the Finns or Lapps are famous in old and modern ac-

[21] ÍF X 1940, 14.
[22] ÍF X 1940, 14.
[23] Sigfússon in ÍF X, 14 note 2. See further Lárusson in KL V 1960, 363 ff. and references.
[24] Kålund 1879–82, 150.
[25] Pálsson 1960, 208.
[26] See above Ch. III.2 and note 29.
[27] de Vries 1962, 351.
[28] The explanation that Le(i)kný is a corruption of *Lenki* has been suggested to me by Professor Magnús Már Lárusson.

counts for their dexterity in these arts.[29] The name Finni itself supports this, for men called Finnr or Finni must often have been Finns or men of Finnish descent.[30] Everything suggests that this woman was of Finnish or Lappish descent and from her her son had inherited that knowledge for which the Lapps were so famed. At the same time it emerges that Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði must himself have been closely acquainted with this branch of witchcraft.

Above I have traced what the sources tell us about Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði the Lawspeaker and his closest relatives. Even if Þorgeir's great-uncle and son were credited with supernatural powers it does not necessarily mean that Þorgeir possessed the same, but it does throw some light on Þorgeir's environment and world of ideas.

Résumé

According to *Íslendingabók* Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði was a lawspeaker for 17 years which clearly shows the confidence he enjoyed among his contemporaries. There are conflicting stories of Þorgeir's lineage in *Landnámabók*, and *Njáls saga* contains still a different version. Yet S and H are in agreement on Þorgeir's children, nine sons and one daughter. A younger source, *Ljósvetninga saga*, says that there was a feud between Þorgeir and his sons in later years and that he could hardly contain them. A still younger source, *Finnboga saga*, describes Þorgeir as a powerful, farsighted chieftain, very influential and with a gift of prophesy. The source-value of this saga is very limited.

Þorgeir's great-uncle was the prescient sacrificer Þorsteinn rauðnefr and Þorgeir's bastard son was Finni the dreamwise, who was famous for his supernatural gift. Finni's mother was probably a Finn or Lapp. This knowledge tells us nothing of Þorgeir's person but gives us some notion of the world of ideas in which Þorgeir lived.

[29] Strömbäck 1935, 198 ff. where examples are given. Arbman 156, 49 ff. Nicolaissen 1887, 7 f. Janzén in NK VII, 56.

[30] Granlund in KL IV 1959, 278 ff.

XIII. Under the cloak

1. Over his head?

Next we have to consider Þorgeir's stay under the cloak; why he lay under it and why so long. *Íslendingabók* only says: "And then when men went to the booths, Þorgeir lay down and spread his cloak over him, and rested all that day and the night after, and did not speak a word. But the next morning he sat up and gave the word for men to go to Lǫgberg" (see above Ch. VII.1). In other sources on the acceptance of Christianity there is a deviation from *Íslendingabók* in the description of how Þorgeir went beneath the cloak. In *Odd's Ólafssaga* it says: *breiddi feld sinn á hǫfuð sér*[1] (spread his cloak over his head). The same statement that Þorgeir spread the cloak over his head is also in *Ól.Tr.m., yfir hǫfuð* sér[2] (over his head), in *Kristni saga, á hǫfuð sér*[3] (on his head), and in *Njáls saga, á hǫfuð sér*[4] (on his head). There is much to suggest that the scholars who consider the whole chapter on the acceptance of Christianity in *Odd's Ólafssaga* in the Am 310, 4to version, is based on the first redaction of Ari's *Íslendingabók*, are correct.[5] The phrase "on his head" could then originally have come from that book. *Íslendingabók's* expression, spread his cloak over him, does not exclude the understanding that Þorgeir's head was covered. Therefore it cannot be unreasonable to assume that it was implied by Ari and his informant, Teitr, that Þorgeir covered his head with the cloak.

2. The explanations by Konrad Maurer, Björn M. Ólsen and some other scholars

Þorgeir's expedient of lying down under his cloak and lying so long has understandably attracted the attention of scholars who have dealt with the Conversion. Various explanations have been proposed and I shall now trace the main ones.

Konrad Maurer writes: "Wie ernst übrigens Thorgeir die Schwierigkeiten der Lage in's Auge fasste, beweist die lange Dauer und die imponierende

[1] *Odd's Ólafssaga* 1932, 129.
[2] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 191.
[3] ASB 11, 39.
[4] ÍF XII, 271.
[5] Turville-Petre 1953, 100. Almqvist 1974, 55 and note 6. See further above Ch. V.3.

Innerlichkeit seiner Ueberlegung; wie trefflich seine Vorschläge auf die einmal gegebenen Zustande des Landes berechnet waren, beweist der Erfolg, welcher deren Zweckmässigkeit glänzend bewährte."[6] (Þorgeir's long stay and the great profundity of his consideration prove how seriously he took the problems of the situation. How exactly his proposals were calculated to suit the situation that prevailed in the country is shown by the outcome which brilliantly confirmed their expediency.)

These words clearly show that Maurer must have been of the opinion that Þorgeir lay down under the cloak and stayed there to ponder over the substance of the laws that he had been asked to decide on. Maurer maintains that before Þorgeir lay down under the cloak he had been told by Síðu-Hallr that the Christians would not offer any compromise as far as their main objective, the Christian faith, was concerned, even though they might give way on some smaller issues. Þorgeir's pondering had this basis and, bearing in mind the future prosperity of the country and the rapid advance of Christianity, he arrived at his brilliant solution.[7]

Maurer's conclusion in this matter appears to be based on *Ól.Tr.m.* where we are told that Síðu-Hallr made three conditions, however Þorgeir might choose to promulgate other laws.[8] I have attempted to show above (Ch. XI.3) how this account in *Ól.Tr.m.* conflicts with everything that is known of Síðu-Hallr and how unlikely it is that he should have put forward such unreasonable demands. But it is possible that this account in *Ól.Tr.m.* is based on an agreement between Þorgeir and Síðu-Hallr (see Ch. XI.4 above), by which Þorgeir was to proclaim a separate body of laws for the Christians. Such separate laws would have had to state that all those who accepted them should be Christian, but not that all Icelanders should be, as said in *Ól.Tr.m.*[9]

Björn M. Ólsen maintains that Þorgeir made an agreement with Síðu-Hallr about the contents of laws to be proclaimed for all Icelanders, where unity was achieved under the banner of Christianity and the old constitution. He continues: "These were the items of agreement. When they had been agreed upon by the Christian party and the majority of the heathen *goðar*, Þorgeir went to his booth, lay down and pulled a cloak over his head to have peace to think, not about the contents of the laws which he was to proclaim, for this had already been agreed upon, but about the important speech accompanying the proclamation, and to weigh each word so as not to offend either party. If he did not choose his words right one might expect that the agreement could come to nothing."[10]

[6] Maurer 1 1855, 443.
[7] Maurer 1 1855, 440 f.
[8] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 191.
[9] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 191.
[10] Ólsen 1900, 102 f.

In this Björn M. Ólsen goes a stage further than Maurer, who maintained that Þorgeir, through his pondering underneath the cloak, had reached a decision on the substance of the laws that he was to promulgate. Björn M. Ólsen on the other hand says that the substance of the laws had been agreed upon before Þorgeir lay down under the cloak; there he was only preparing the speech to accompany the proclamation.

No doubt Þorgeir had to choose his words carefully in the situation the Althing found itself in, where fluctuations were frequent and the tension immense. But it is self-evident that the substance of the laws proclaimed by Þorgeir was so much more important and fateful than the wording of his speech that the theory that, the two parties having reached an immediate agreement, the person who was to proclaim the laws should then retire for 24 hours to deliberate upon his speech, can probably be ruled out. I cannot accept Björn M. Ólsen's explanation of Þorgeir's stay under the cloak. It seems a clumsy explanation, necessitated by the fact that Þorgeir's stay under the cloak had somehow to be accounted for after Björn M. Ólsen had argued that agreement was reached by the Christians and heathens before Þorgeir retired to his booth. It is true that Björn M. Ólsen assumed that it was still necessary for Þorgeir to persuade some sections of the heathen party by his speech, but that the majority of the heathen *goðar* had already given their blessing to the agreement the previous day. This is not strong enough an argument to make us consider the speech more important than the negotiations. And here we can add what I attempted to show above (Ch. XI.3), that since Ari makes no reference to any such agreement, it can be considered out of the question that there ever was one.

Several scholars have accepted Björn M. Ólsen's explanation of Þorgeir's conduct, among others Bogi Th. Melsteð in his *Íslendingasaga*, and Bishop Jón Helgason in *Kristnisaga Íslands*.[11]

In his contribution to the History of Iceland published in 1974, Sigurður Líndal expresses a very similar opinion, i.e. that Þorgeir agreed to promulgate tha laws which were to accompany Christianity, while he was still a pagan. The outcome was therefore clear when he went to his booth and lay down under his cloak. Whereas he still had to study ways of influencing the assembly and persuade the great majority of pagans to accept his conclusion.[12]

3. The explanation by Jón Jóhannesson

In his *Íslendinga saga* Jón Jóhannesson assumes that Síðu-Hallr and Þorgeir agreed that Þorgeir should promulgate the laws, but that "both par-

[11] Melsteð 1910, 390 f. Helgason 1925, 33.
[12] Líndal 1974, 246.

ties should relax their demands somewhat."[13] Jóhannesson does not consider this agreement to have been made public at first, but he reckons that the pagans were less likely to suspect Þorgeir of making concessions because he was a goði as well as the lawspeaker. He continues: "He (i.e. Þorgeir) now had to get both the Christians and pagans to accept his jurisdiction in this matter. Therefore he pondered upon the matter privately in his booth the rest of the day and the following night."[14]

Thus Jón Jóhannesson maintains that Þorgeir had to get the two parties to agree to his jurisdiction in addition to deciding on the issue. He draws the same conclusion about Síðu-Hall's attitude as we argued above (Ch. XI.3), i.e. that Síðu-Hallr with the consent of the Christians modified their demands. But it is much less certain that the pagans made any concessions at this stage, or before Þorgeir retired under the cloak. *Íslendingabók* gives us no reason to conclude this. Nor is it clear how Þorgeir received his jurisdiction from the pagans to decide on this matter alone, but such a jurisdiction he must have had, otherwise his promulgation would not have been respected.

4. The explanation by Sigurður Nordal

Finally I should like to mention here the explanation by Sigurður Nordal of Þorgeir's actions:

"Scholars who use modern politics as a point of reference find this an unlikely tale. They feel that Þorgeir had other things to do than rest under his cloak. He is more likely to have used his time for negotiations and discussions with men from both parties. But on the one hand Ari had reliable sources about the acceptance of Christianity, and on the other Þorgeir's behaviour is not at all like what people would have guessed. What was he doing? He obviously does not lie down to sleep. He has got more important matters on his mind. When he sits up and has then decided on the matter and clarified it, he has been awake for over 24 hours. He covers himself with a cloak for solitude. He neither speaks to nor listens to others. He goes without food and keeps vigil in order to hear the prophetic voice of his own consciousness (*sagnarandi eigin vitundar*), just like Egill when he wanted to compose a poem. Þorgeir's deliberation is an exercise to gain divine strength. A man who resorts to this at such a time does not do this for the first time. He has long practised it. Björn M. Ólsen said once jokingly that Þorgeir was composing Völuspá under the cloak. This was a clever remark. Poets and wise men have known how to use the same method to sharpen

[13] Jóhannesson 1956, 163.
[14] Jóhannesson 1956, 163.

their senses. When Þorgeir started his speech he did not only present to the assembly a well-thought-out speech, which was so clear and convincing that everybody could understand it, the man himself came out of his meditation with a powerful calmness in his manner and a brilliance in his looks which charmed his audience into listening to his speech and relying on his decision."[15]

This explanation has a personal note and is very remarkable. There are many things in it worthy of particular attention. The author rejects the theories which call in doubt Ari's account[16] and points to various things which support its veracity. It is not quite clear what is meant by *sagnarandi eigin vitundar* (prophetic voice of his own consciousness), though *sagnarandi* is a well known phenomenon in Icelandic folk-belief. It is a sort of a wise being, invisible, which the owner can call upon and learn from when necessary.[17] The *sagnarandi* of one's own consciousness is therefore probably meant to refer to knowledge one possesses but has to exert oneself to produce. The reference to Egill and his poetic work is worthy of note in this connection and will be discussed later (Ch. XIII.9 below). That Þorgeir was practising a form of contemplative exercise which he was long used to could well be near the truth. An "exercise to gain divine strength" might mean in the context a means of gaining the support of the heathen gods,[18] but this is not clear. When Nordal mentions poets and wise men, but not prophets, later in his discussion, we may take it as a hint that he thinks Þorgeir's stay under his cloak was first and foremost an attempt to call upon the resources of his own mind, an attempt to solve a great problem through meditation. Sigurður Nordal therefore appears to be of the same opinion as the other scholars whom I have mentioned above in thinking that Þorgeir stayed under the cloak to meditate. According to Nordal, Þorgeir stayed awake all the time and it is in the light of that assertion that his words about the "prophetic voice of his own consciousness" and "an attempt to gain divine strength", which undoubtedly point out beyond the boundaries of human thought, are to be judged.

5. An overestimation of Þorgeir's speech

We have now traced the explanations put forward by the chief scholars for Þorgeir's stay under the cloak. They all consider that Þorgeir was lying there thinking about his subject matter. Those who describe his stay there at

[15] Nordal 1942, 226.
[16] See Arnórsson 1942, 113.
[17] Árnason I 1961, 421 ff.
[18] LP 1966, 391.

all closely consider he was awake all the time. In his explanation Konrad Maurer closely follows the text of *Íslendingabók* when he says that Þorgeir was thinking about the contents of the laws that it was his appointment and duty to proclaim. And under the cloak he reached a decision on how these laws should be. Sigurður Nordal also assumes that Þorgeir lay under the cloak to prepare his decision and that his preparation resulted in his solution being trusted and accepted. Jón Jóhannesson rightly emphasises how important it was for Þorgeir to get both parties to accept his jurisdiction in the matter. But one of the main problems in connection with the acceptance of Christianity in Iceland must always be *why* the pagans accepted Þorgeir's decision. This point is not argued well enough by Maurer, and Björn M. Ólsen appears to have seen the flaw in his argument. Consequently Björn M. Ólsen puts forward the theory that the Christians and heathens agreed upon the main contents of the law the day before, thereby attempting to explain Þorgeir's authority and the pagan acceptance of his decision. But then we have the strange paradox that, while matters were decided upon in next to no time, the lawspeaker used about 24 hours to prepare the speech that should accompany his promulgation. This is very unlikely to have been the case—it both contradicts *Íslendingabók* and cannot be considered natural. The result has been that those scholars who have favoured the explanation by Björn M. Ólsen have greatly overestimated Þorgeir's speech.[19] Even if Þorgeir's speech was pithy and eloquent as discussed in the following chapter (Ch. XIV.1), we must reject the possibility that it could have had the fantastic influence that is sometimes claimed,[20]—that it was through his speech that he got his jurisdiction accepted and only because of his speech that the pagans accepted his decision as unanimously as they did.

6. Scholars must be bound by Ari's word

Following on Björn M. Ólsen's explanation of Þorgeir and Síðu-Hall's agreement some scholars have rejected Þorgeir's stay under the cloak entirely. Thus Einar Arnórsson maintains that Þorgeir would have found other things more necessary than to lie down and bide his time. And he continues: "The careful, influential men of both parties who had to find a way out of the impasse therefore had to do something about it. Þorgeir the Lawspeaker was in all probability among them."[21] If we assume that the Christian and pagan leaders in fact agreed upon the matter, this stay under

[19] Helgason 1925, 33 f. Lindal 1974, 246.
[20] Jóhannesson 1956, 163.
[21] Arnórsson 1940, 113 ff.

the cloak must be considered unnecessary. In this we can agree with Einar Arnórsson, but there is no evidence of an agreement between the Christians and pagans except the agreement which Síðu-Hallr made with Þorgeir that the latter should proclaim the laws for the Christians (see above Ch. XI.5). The sources are unanimous that Þorgeir stayed under his cloak for about 24 hours and we must be bound by that evidence. And as Sigurður Nordal has pointed out, Þorgeir's behaviour is not at all like what people would have guessed (see Ch. XIII.4 above). Here we can also mention the words of Björn Sigfússon who has this to say about Einar Arnórsson's arguments: "It is pointless to deliberate whether it was better for the leader to be under his cloak or to be up through the night among heathen priests and apostates, for Ari considers that he knows something about this and there is no other evidence."[22] Here Björn Sigfússon points out the obvious fact that scholars must be bound by Ari's words and that they must prefer them to younger sources. Hence one can reject every attempt at explanation which is at odds with *Íslendingabók*.

7. To solve the problem

From what has been said here it is clear that scholars have not put forward a satisfactory explanation of why Þorgeir lay down under his cloak and what was the purpose of his stay there. Nor it is clear where Þorgeir got his decisive power of jurisdiction that he could proclaim that the pagans should accept Christianity so convincingly that nobody spoke against him. This Þorgeir did when he emerged from his stay under the cloak. On the other hand the situation was such, when he retired under the cloak, that the Christians and the heathens had declared themselves out of law with each other and Síðu-Hallr had asked Þorgeir to proclaim laws for the Christians. Þorgeir was the man on which the next action depended. He lay down in his booth and spread his cloak over him and there he stayed for about 24 hours where he did not say a word and no-one addressed him. The sources say no more about his stay there and assertions as to whether he was awake or asleep therefore have no validity. On the other hand it is feasible to argue that Þorgeir lay down under the cloak to resolve how to proceed with this case. One must then explain how he could solve his problem this way and see whether there are any parallel accounts of people solving other problems in a similar way. I shall now cite the instances that are most pertinent.

[22] Sigfússon 1944, 47 note.

8. To murmur or mutter into one's cloak

Þorgeir's cloak is the only object mentioned. Cloak, *feldr*, was usually made of wollen cloth. The cloak was thrown over the shoulder and fastened in front with a brooch or pin or toggle.[23] These cloaks were of some value and it might happen that some kind of good fortune was supposed to accompany them, some kind of trust put in them. Thus it says in *Víga-Glúms saga* that Vigfús, Glúm's grandfather, gave him a cloak among other lucky gifts which he and his kinsmen are said to have had great faith in. These talismans ensured Glúm's safety as long as he possessed them.[24] In addition we can mention that the old Icelandic sources describe Óðinn in a cloak.[25]

In old Icelandic we have the expression, *þylja í feld sinn* (to murmur or mutter into one's cloak). This action is explained in two stories which throw some light upon what is meant. In *Geirmundar þáttr* we are told how the parentage of Geirmundr and Hámundr heljarskinn was revealed. Their mother had exchanged them newborn for the son of a female slave but nobody knew about it. The poet Bragi came on a visit to King Hjǫr, their father, and stayed at home one day when the king was out hunting.

Bragi skáld . . . sat í ǫndvegi ok hafði reyrsprota einn í hendi sér ok leikr at ok þuldi í feld sinn. Drottning lá á þilpalli utar í hǫllunni ok var hulin klæðum, svá at ekki mátti vita, hvárt hon var þar, nema þeir er áðr vissu.[26] (Bragi the poet . . . sat in the highseat and had a stick in his hand and played with it and murmured into his cloak. The queen was lying on boarded flooring towards the door of the hall and was covered with clothes so nobody could know that she was there except those who knew beforehand.) Geirmundr and Hámundr now attacked the changeling prince and took from him some toy, but he broke down and screamed. Then the poet got up, walked over to where the queen was lying and recited a verse in which he guessed correctly the parentage of all the three boys. The poet seems to have sensed as he muttered into his cloak what the parentage was of the three boys who were fighting there. It is not impossible that he guessed this from their reactions and the strength of Geirmundr and Hámundr but it seems to be indicated that he somehow got to know this through his prescience. In the same way he seems to have sensed where the queen was lying hidden.

In *Landnámabók*, S and H, we have another and shorter version of this story, in which the queen invited the poet Bragi to come to look at the boys,

[23] ÍF X, 22 note 4. *Grágás* I b, 192. ÍF XXVI, 212 and note 1 and references; 222 and note 1.
[24] *Víga-Glúms saga* 1940, 11.
[25] *Eddadigte* II, 12.
[26] *Sturlunga saga* 1906, 2.

probably with the view to telling their fortunes, or giving an opinion on how they would turn out.[27] *Landnámabók* does not mention the cloak, but both the stick which Bragi carried and the boarded flooring where the queen hid.[28]

Above (Ch. II.2) we have traced the connection between *Landnámabók* and *Geirmundar þáttr*, concluding that *Geirmundar þáttr* was an older source than S and H and was probably based on an older version of *Landnámabók* closely related to M (Ch. II.2 above and notes 17–22). M only preserves the beginning of the tale of Geirmundr and Hámundr, Bragi's verse then appearing completely out of context (ÍF I, 151). Something is clearly missing from the text so M does not supply evidence of the oldest version of these events in *Landnámabók*.

Hálfs saga, one of the young *Fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda* (Mythical-heroic Sagas), also contains this tale.[29] There the cloak is not mentioned, but Bragi is said to have touched with a stick the clothing concealing the queen.[30] *Fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda* are thought to have been written chiefly in the 14th century, so it is fairly certain that this is the latest version of this tale.[31] *Geirmundar þáttr* therefore preserves the oldest version of this tale and it is the only version which has Bragi muttering into his cloak where he was sitting. So we may assume that this was an ancient motif.

The other story is in the *þáttr* of Þorsteinn Oxfoot in *Flateyjarbók*, and relates that one day Þorsteinn as a young boy came to Krossavík: *Þá sat Geitir faðir bónda á palli ok þuldi í feld sinn. En er piltrinn kom í stofuna þá fór hann mjǫk geystr sem bǫrnum er títt. Fellr hann á stofugólfinu, ok er Geitir sér þetta, skellir hann upp ok hlær . . . Piltrinn gengr innar at Geiti ok mælti: "Hvárt þótti þér þetta allbrosligt, er ek fell áðan?" Geitir svarar: "Þar er satt, því at ek sá þat er þú sást eigi . . . er þú komst í stofuna fylgdi þér einn hvítabjarnarhúnn ok rann fyrir innar á gólfit. En er hann sá mik nam hann staðar en þú fórst heldr geystr ok fellst þú um húninn. Ok er þat ætlan mín, at þú sért eigi son Krums ok Þórgunnar, heldr muntu stærri ættar.*[32] (Geitir the farmer's father sat up on a dais and muttered into his cloak. The boy entered the hall very impetuously as children are wont. He fell on the floor and when Geitir sees this he bursts out laughing . . . The boy advanced towards Geitir and asked whether he found it very funny that he fell just then. Geitir answered: "That is true for I saw what you didn't see . . . when you entered the hall you were accompanied by a polar-bear cub

[27] ÍF I, 150 ff.
[28] ÍF I, 150 ff. and notes 4 and 5. Jóhannesson 1941, 166 ff.
[29] FAS II, 45 f. Sveinsson in KL IV 1959, 499 ff. and references.
[30] FAS II, 45 f.
[31] Sveinsson in KL IV 1959, 499 ff. and references.
[32] Flateyjarbók 1860, 252 f.

which ran in front of you across the floor. When it saw me it suddenly halted, but you were in rather a hurry and you fell over the cub. And it is my opinion that you are not the son of Krumr and Þórgunnr but of a nobler family.")

There can be no doubt here about Geiti's clairvoyance as he sat and muttered into his cloak. He saw the fetch which ran in front of Þorsteinn—it was not the fetch of a cotter and therefore Geitir knew that Þorsteinn was not the son of the couple who brought him up.

These two stories have several common aspects. Thus both relate the discovery of the parentage of young boys, different and nobler than had been maintained. And those who made this discovery were in both cases seated and muttering into their cloaks when they made the discovery. It is quite possible that there is some literary link between the two stories, even though various dissimilar elements exclude the possibility that one is directly modelled on the other. But both stories underline the fact that at the time they were composed it was believed that a good way of gaining hidden information and seeing what others could not see was to sit and mutter into one's cloak.

9. Prophets, soothsayers and poets

The verb *at þylja* meant of old to speak or recite,[33] but especially to murmur, mutter, mumble, and it is this last meaning which is thought appropriate for *þylja í feld sinn*. What people *þylja* was often some kind of soothsaying. It is said of Njáll in Bergþórshvoll that he often sought solitude and "mumbled" when people first had news of Christianity. And he could tell people that Christianity was better than heathendom.[34] The sentence about Njál's "mumbling" is considered an interpolation in the section on Christianity in *Njáls saga*.[35] But whatever the origin of the sentence, whether the author received it from oral source or a written text or composed it himself, he included it in the firm belief that Njáll could gain information about the nature of Christianity by withdrawing from others in order to "mumble". The author also knew that his readers would accept this account of Njál's conduct as valid.

Þórhallr veiðimaðr lay "and mumbled something" (*ok þuldi nǫkkut*) when his companions found him on the cliff in Vinland. But by that time he had by his conduct and with Thór's assistance enticed a whale onto their beach when they had no food left.[36] In *Fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda* the ex-

[33] LP 1966, 653.
[34] ÍF XII, 255.
[35] Sveinsson 1933, 68.
[36] ÍF IV, 224.

pression occurs, *þylja í gaupnir sér*[37] "to mumble into one's hands", and it also refers to soothsaying. The *þulr*, the man whose activity was *at þylja*, was sometimes cast in the role of a soothsayer, but the name can also mean the one who speaks or narrates.[38] To mutter or murmur or mumble into one's cloak thus means, as far as one can tell, to rehearse some kind of soothsaying. Those who practised this seemed by their conduct to be able to see what was hidden to others and to gain information in a supernatural way. They appear to have pulled their cloaks over their heads mainly to concentrate better on their task.

Prophets and soothsayers were not alone in covering their heads with a cloak. The poets did so too. We read in *Egils saga: Ok er á leið haustit, tók Egill ógleði mikla, sat opt ok drap hǫfðinu niðr í feld sinn.*[39] (And as the autumn passed, Egill became very depressed, often sat with his head down in his cloak.) Arinbjǫrn spoke to him and asked among other things: "... *hvat kveðr þú nú? Láttu mik nú heyra.*"[40] ("What are you now composing? Let me hear it.") The author of *Egils saga* is in no doubt that Arinbjǫrn knows that Egill is composing when he sites there in this manner. This is a parallel to the soothsayers who murmured into their cloaks, for as is well known, poets and prophets often use similar methods to attain their end.[41]

The examples given here lead us to conclude that it was a common practice with Icelandic poets and prophets in heathen times to pull a cloak over their heads when they wanted peace to cultivate their skills, opening their minds to the source of poetry and supernatural knowledge. In externals Þorgeir's conduct appears somewhat similar. He pulls a cloak over his head like the poets and soothsayers.[42] The difference is that Þorgeir seems to go much further than the others I have mentioned above. He does not address anybody when he lies under his cloak, and appears to be much further removed from his surroundings than the poet Bragi and Geitir in Krossavík. And no-one approaches him and addresses him as Arinbjǫrn does Egill.

10. The body lies as if asleep or dead

There exist several legends, which can be traced back to heathen times, about people lying down in a similar way to Þorgeir. According to *Landnámabók*, S and H, Loðmundr the old prepared to leave Loðmundarfjord when he heard that his highseat-pillars had come to shore in the south of

[37] FAS III, 133.
[38] LP 1966, 650.
[39] ÍF II, 148.
[40] ÍF II, 148.
[41] Nordal 1942, 226.
[42] See above Ch. XIII, 1.

Iceland. This is said about his departure: *Eptir þat bar hann á skip ǫll fǫng sín, en er segl var dregit, lagðisk hann niðr ok bað øngvan mann vera svá djarfan at hann nefndi. En er hann hafði skamma hríð legit, varð gnýr mikill; þá sá menn at skriða mikil hljóp á bæ þann er Loðmundr hafði búit á. Eptir þat settisk hann upp ok tók til orða.*[43] (After this he loaded a ship with all his belongings, and when the sail had been hoisted, he lay down and told no-one to be so bold as to speak his name. But when he had been lying there a short while there was a great din. Then people saw a great landslide fall on the farm where Loðmundr had lived. After this he sat up and spoke.) It is stated that Loðmundr was *rammaukinn mjǫk ok fjǫlkunnigr*[44] (very powerful and skilled in magic). It is not told that he covered himself with anything, but it is clearly stated that he forbade people to mention his name.

In *Vatnsdæla saga* there is the story of Ingimundr the old sending three Lapps by witchcraft to Iceland to inspect the country. They gave the following instructions: "*Nú skal oss byrgja eina saman í húsi, ok nefni oss engi maðr,*" *ok svá var gǫrt. Ok er liðnar váru þrjár nætr kom Ingimundr til þeirra. Þeir risu þá upp ok vǫrpuðu fast ǫndinni ok mæltu.*[45] ("Now we are to be shut in alone and no-one is to utter our names," and this was done. And when the three nights had passed Ingimundr went to see them. They rose up, heaved a sigh and spoke.) A similar arrangement was demanded by Gauten and Ógautan, when Jǫkull Narfason asked them to find out where the sons of Víkingr were staying, according to the saga of Þorsteinn Víkingsson. They asked for a house to sleep in for three nights, and Jǫkull warned everybody not to mention their names while they were lying there.[46]

The above examples and others are cited by Dag Strömbäck in connection with a study of Snorri's words on the practice of *seiðr: lá þá búkrinn sem sofinn eða dauðr*[47] (then the body lay as if it were asleep or dead), and other sources connected with metamorphosis.[48] Most often the body of a person lies "as if asleep or dead", but at the same time his spirit, soul or mind emerges in the shape of some animal, often to join in battle or other conflict.[49] The condition of the body is not particularly mentioned during the metamorphosis, except in the saga of Hjálmþér and Ølver. There we are told that when King Hundingr came in the shape of a whale to the ship of Hjálmþér, his friend, Hǫrðr lay down in the bottom of the ship, had himself

[43] ÍF I, 304.
[44] ÍF I, 304.
[45] ÍF VIII, 35.
[46] FAS II, 411.
[47] *Heimskringla* 1911, 7.
[48] Strömbäck 1935, 182 ff.
[49] Strömbäck 1935, 182 ff. and references.

covered with clothes and said that no-one should utter his name. At that moment a humpbacked whale attacked the whale. When the fight was over, Hǫrðr rose and asked someone to go to Hervǫr who was there on another ship. She also knew the art of metamorphosis and had helped Hǫrðr fight the whale. In the fight Hervǫr had appeared in the shape of a whale (*vagna*) but now she lay unconscious at the bottom of the other ship.[50]

Hǫrðr covered with clothes is undeniably reminiscent of Þorgeir under his cloak. Another possible similarity is that in all the above-mentioned stories it is forbidden to mention the names of those who lie down. This corresponds with what *Njáls saga* says about Þorgeir, that no-one spoke to him,[51] something that people are bound to have wanted to at the General Assembly all this time, unless it was very urgent that they should not.

Of course it is no guarantee that *Njáls saga* is historically valid on this issue for we have already shown how limited it is as a source (above Ch. V.5). But if this account in *Njáls saga* is not historically sound, it appears that the author associated Þorgeir's soujourn under the cloak with behaviour of the kind we have described.

11. Lapplanders' metamorphosis

In legends from northern Norway collected in the last century, there is a story called "The Journey of the Finn". A Lapplander went from Lofoten in the north of Norway to Helgeland south of Lofoten by metamorphosis to find out for his colleague what was happening at home. When this had been agreed upon we are told: "The Finn now got under the bench and he urged that no-one should touch him—'on any account'—for fear of the consequences. He drew his head, hands and feet in under his cloak and it was as if the cloak collapsed and its owner had left it. When the Finn retired under the bench the cook had just put some soup on the stove but before it was cooked there was a movement in the cloak. The Finn emerged, and started raging about some rascal having touched his cloak. "For when I was out in the Westfjord", he said, "I sank so deep that I landed in a shoal of lumpfish and I only just escaped being eaten up by these greedy fish." Yes, it could not be denied that a youth had jabbed at the cloak with a stick."[52] This did not prevent the Finn from concluding his journey. He could also inform the Helglander what was going on at his home and later it was all found to be true.[53]

[50] FAS III, 390 f.
[51] ÍF XII, 271.
[52] Nicolaissen 1887, 7. Bo Almqvist drew my attention to this story.
[53] Nicolaissen 1887, 7 f.

The Lapplander who withdrew into his cloak in the fisherman's hut in Lofoten reminds us of Icelanders of old who withdrew into their cloaks. His metamorphosis is of a similar nature to that of the Lapps Ingimundr the old sent to Iceland. In the last few centuries more such stories have been recorded of Lapplanders.[54] There is for example the account of the Lapplander who performed his deed for the archbishop of Uppsala in the middle of the 19th century in the presence of a doctor and other officialis. Before he started he got all those present to promise not to touch him, disturb or awaken him, while he was motionless: "For my soul will leave the body and I will appear to be dead. But in a short while my soul returns and then I awaken." All this turned out as the Lapplander had said, but it is noteworthy that the death hue of the Lapplander was so real that the doctor wanted to start revival attempts and would have done so if the archbishop had not firmly opposed to it.[55] This is obviously closely related to Snorri's description of the body as if it were asleep or dead. These examples further support the relationship between Norsemen and Lapplanders as far as this art of *seiðr* is concerned, as Dag Strömbäck has conclusively shown.[56]

In recent years more scholars have produced evidence of the connection between the shamanism of the Lapps and various practices mentioned in ancient Icelandic works. Thus Buchholz makes a detailed comparison of various supernatural practices mentioned in the old Icelandic sources and shamanism.[57] His main conclusion is that on many occasions direct connection is highly probable[58] and sometimes the connection appears greater than previously shown.[59]

Grambo has dealt with similar matters in a recent article.[60] In his study he has concentrated on Lappish, Norse and more recent Norwegian materials. He finds traits in common in the shamanism of the Lapps and the Norse *seiðr*, such as ecstatic sleep and magic songs. Then Grambo gives examples of how these phenomena change in Norway from being an actual part of the religious practice to being only tools of prescience.[61]

12. Irish soothsayers and poets

In a lecture from 1912, recently published, Bergin touches upon the relationship between poets and soothsayers in Ireland.[62] The practice of the

[54] See Strömbäck 1935, 160 ff.
[55] Arbman 1956, 52 ff.
[56] Strömbäck 1935, 160 ff.
[57] Buchholz 1968, 5 ff.
[58] Buchholz 1968, 50; 56; 70 f.; 78 f.
[59] Buchholz 1968 71 ff.; 79.
[60] Grambo 1973, 417.
[61] Grambo 1973, 420 ff.; 424 f.
[62] Bergin 1970, 3.

poets to compose in the dark he believes to be the remnants of pagan rites. It is known that in early times the functions of the poet and the druid or magician were very similar, and both practised magic. This practice continued after the advent of Christianity and in that connection Bergin quotes a ninth-century source, Cormac's Glossary, which says that "sorcery that involved no offering to devils is regarded a lawful branch of science".[63]

O'Rahilly tells of two Irish soothsayers, *filid*, who socked a raw lump of meat when they sacrificed to their gods. Then they lay down to sleep, and in their sleep they learned what they wanted to know.[64] Of similar nature is the so called "bull-sleep", *tairbfheis*, which informed people who should be the king of Tara. The ceremony commenced with a bull slaughtered, the meat eaten and the blood drunk, after which people slept and in their sleep the future king appeared.[65] In continuation of this, O'Rahilly traces Keating's account of the pagan soothsaying method in Ireland practised by the druids. They spread the hide of a newly slaughtered animal on a rock, turned the raw side up and invoked the spirits in order to learn from them.[66] The ending of Keating's account is unclear, but O'Rahilly says that it can be concluded that the druids terminated the ceremony by wrapping the hide round them and lying down to sleep. In that way they gained the information they desired. In support of this O'Rahilly gives examples of a similar procedure which long existed in the scottish islands. In a secluded place far from houses a man lay a whole night wrapped up in a bull's hide. Then invisible friends of his told him what he desired to know.[67] O'Rahilly adds that when *filid* were not soothsayers but poets by trade it was believed that they only received poetic inspiration when they lay alone in the dark.[68]

These Irish sources are important parallels to the Norse ones and not least because they show the same connection between poets and soothsayers as we find between Egill and those who muttered into their cloaks. This shows the diffusal of these soothsaying method over the Nordic cultural area; but there are also parallels to be found in ancient Greece.[69]

13. An account of necromancy in Iceland

Icelandic popular belief also contains traces of similar actions to what has been described above. There is an instance of a man lying a whole night

[63] Bergin 1970, 9 f.
[64] O'Rahilly 1946, 323.
[65] Thurneysen 1921, 421. See further Bergin 1970, 10.
[66] O'Rahilly 1946, 323. See further Bergin 1970, 10 and references.
[67] O'Rahilly 1946, 323 f. See further Martin 1935, 111 f.
[68] O'Rahilly 1946, 324.
[69] O'Rahilly 1946, 325 note.

wrapped in a hide in a secluded place to gain information. In folk-tales collected by Jón Árnason in the 19th century this is considered an accepted method when "sitting out" (performing necromancy) which was most successful if done on New Year's Eve or Midsummernight.[70] Necromancy on New Year's Eve is thus described:

"He who intended to practise 'sitting out' to gain news had to equip himself with a gray cat, a grey sheepskin, a walrus hide or the hide of an old bull, and an axe. All this the necromancer should take to a crossroads all of which led straight and unbroken to four churches. At the crossroads the person was to lie down, cover himself with the hide and tuck it in on every side so no part of the body was left visible. He is to hold the axe between his hands and stare at the edge and look neither left nor right whatever happened; nor was he to answer should someone address him. In this posture one is to lie motionless till dawn of the following day. When the necromancer had finished installing himself he started an incantation and the formulas that were necessary to summon the dead. Thereupon his relatives appeared, if he had any buried at one or more of the four churches which the roads led to, and they told him everything he wanted to know, both things that had come to pass and were to pass many centuries hence. If the necromancer was steadfast enough to stare at the edge of the axe, never take his eyes off it and not say a word whatever happened, he would not only remember everything the dead told him, but he could, whenever he wanted to and without any risk, receive news from them of everything he wanted to know by sitting out."[71]

The method described here has several features in common with the methods of the Scots and Irish to gain knowledge, mentioned above. There is evidence that both are remnants of the same art, which was once practised in the Nordic culture area. But the account in Jón Árnason's folk-tales shows clearly that this soothsaying method was rapidly passing into oblivion when the tale was recorded and ideas about it somewhat faded in peoples' minds. Thus at the beginning of the tale there are many more objects described as parts of the necromancer's equipment than he really requires. The hide and the axe are the objects he uses, but the grey cat and the sheepskin are objects which people in all likelihood imagined could also be useful at supernatural actions. According to the sources, "sitting out" appears to have taken two forms in particular. On the one hand, the necromancer may be active, he chants spells and uses other means to summon the dead from their places in order to obtain from them whatever information was desired. On the other hand, he is inactive, he listens to the

[70] Árnason I 1961, 423.
[71] Árnason I 1961, 423.

sounds of nature and is on the look out for the visitation of the spirits of the night.[72] In the description of necromancy in Jón Árnason's folk-tales these two methods appear to be mixed up with old soothsaying behaviour, when the person whose task it was to gain information wrapped round himself the hide of a sacrificial animal and lay down to sleep overnight in order to gain knowledge of what the future held. This method was mainly used in direct connection with animal sacrifices and was therefore naturally discontinued with the advent of Christianity, but necromancy continued longer according to our sources.[73] It is not surprising therefore that these procedures are confused in so late a source. On the other hand, it is quite remarkable that an account of a man who wraps himself in a hide and lies in that manner overnight should be preserved in Iceland. It can hardly be explained except by assuming that this procedure was at one time practised there, and then no doubt in the heathen period, for the procedure must have been closely connected with heathen sacrifices. The pagan priests either practised this themselves or got people to do it who had the necessary knowledge and aptitude for it.

In this connection we can mention the incantation of Þorbjǫrg lítilvǫlva in Greenland. Her preparation and procedure are similar to much that has been described here.[74]

The behaviour of Þorgeir, lying a whole night under his cloak, completely devoid of contact with the crowds of people around him, is on the surface parallel to the behaviour of a person who retires from others overnight, wrapped in the hide of an animal. And there is more to it. In Jón Árnason's folk-tales we are told that the necromancy described there was most successfully attempted on New Year's Eve or Midsummernight.[75] Björn M. Ólsen thinks that it was Midsummernight when Þorgeir lay under his cloak at Þingvellir.[76] It is not certain that this is a correct guess[77] but it must have been very close to this time, the potent period when the nights of the year are shortest.

14. Þorgrímr "covered his head with a cloak"

In *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings* it is related that Þorgrímr Dýrason attacked Atli at his home in Otradalr. Early in the morning they approached the

[72] ÍF XXXIV, 152. Strömbäck 1935, 127 ff. and references.

[73] Strömbäck 1935, 128 and notes 1–7. Grambo 1973, 420 ff. See further ÍF XII, 37 f. where it is related that Svanr wrapped the goat's skin around his head.

[74] ÍF IV, 206 f. Strömbäck 1935, 49 ff.

[75] Árnason I 1961, 423.

[76] Ólsen 1900, 85 f.

[77] Jóhannesson 1956, 160.

farm. *Bað Þorgrímr þá stíga af baki, kvað sik svá syfja, at hann mátti engan veg upp sitja. Þeir gera nú svá, létu hestana bíta, en Þorgrímr sofnaði ok breiddi feld á hǫfuð sér ok lét illa í svefni.*[78] (Þorgrímr told his men to dismount and said he felt so sleepy that he could not stay sitting up. They do so, and allow their horses to graze, but Þorgrímr fell asleep and covered his head with a cloak and turned and tossed in his sleep.) While this was going on, it happens in Otradalr that Atli sleeps very badly and we have this account from him on waking up: "*ek þóttumsk ganga út ór búrinu, ok sá ek, at vargar runnu sunnan á vǫllinn átján saman, en fyrir vǫrgunum rann refkeila ein. Þat var svá slægiligt kvikendi, at slíkt hefi ek aldri sét fyrri. Þat var ógrligt mjǫk ok illiligt. Þat skyggnist víða ok á ǫllu vildi þat augu hafa, ok ǫll sýndusk mér dýrin grimmlig. En er þau váru heim komin at bænum, þá vakði Torfi mik, ok veit ek víst, at þat er manna hugir.*[79] (I thought I came out of the store and I saw 18 wolves run north over the field led by a vixen. It was such a sly beast that I have never seen its equal. It was terrifying and cruel-looking. It was nosing all over the place and wanted to look at everything, and it seemed to me that all the beasts were cruel. But when they arrived at the farm, Torfi woke me up, and I know for certain that they were minds of human beings.) Now Þorgrímr wakes up where he was lying under his cloak and he was hot. He says: "*Heima hefi ek verit um hríð á bænum, ok er svá villt um fyrir mér at ek veit eigi frá mér, en þó munum vér heim ganga at bænum.*"[80] ("I have been over at the farm for some time, but I have been so confused that I am the none wiser, but still we shall proceed to the farm.")

In this example it is quite clear that Þorgrímr lies down and covers his head with a cloak in order to send his mind out of the body on an exploration. This he also did, his mind travelled from the small valley to the house and was met there by Atli's mind who confused it so that Þorgrímr knew nothing when he woke up. It is said of Þorgrímr that he was the greatest sorcerer in Dýrafjǫrðr[81] and in the saga it is especially well described how he went about this.

The existent version of *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings* is considered written early in the 14th century but to be based on a somewhat divergent older version which must have been written before 1280.[82] The existing version of the story is considered of little source-value and some of the characterization resembles that in *Fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda*.[83] It is not clear where

[78] ÍF VI, 349.
[79] ÍF VI, 349 f.
[80] ÍF VI, 350.
[81] ÍF VI, 350.
[82] Nordal 1953, 262; 264. Jónsson in ÍF VI, LXXXIV ff. Sigfússon in KL VI 1961, 259 f.
[83] Jónsson in ÍF VI, XC.

the author of the younger version got hold of Þorgrímr and the cloak for the works which are thought to have influenced the story do not contain any parallel.[84] The chances are that this comes from the older version of the saga as part of the old legendary material on which it was based.[85] Of course nothing can be concluded on this issue and we must be careful not to read too much into the silent sources.

15. Finnbogi and the cloak

In *Finnboga saga* (see above Ch. XII.1) it is stated that Finnbogi twice suffered the attack of a paid assassin. The two episodes are very similar. First Finnbogi becomes very sleepy, and in the first episode: *kastar sér niðr ok vefr feldi um hǫfuð sér*[86] (lies down and wraps a cloak around his head). In the latter: *Finnbogi kastar sér niðr . . . ok kastar á sik feldinum*[87] (Finnbogi lies down . . . and throws his cloak over him). In both episodes Finnbogi jumps up before the assassin can do him any harm.

In this account the cloak does not appear to have any bearing on the story so its function is not clear. We must therefore assume that the author has resorted to phraseology which in his day has lost its old significance but survives in the language as an idiom. But it is clear that this idiom was at one time used to describe a meaningful behaviour. The fact that the expressions concerning the cloak have no bearing on the story indicates that they have found their way into the story as ancient distorted reminiscence, but not from contemporary works.

16. Ancient norse practice

Neither *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings* nor *Finnboga saga* are valid historical sources. Nevertheless they reflect the ideas of Icelandic authors at the close of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century and show what they could present their readers with. Their historicity may be of no value but from the point of view of the history of ideas the tales of Þorgrímr and Finnbogi are important parallels in helping us to judge Þorgeir's purpose in lying down under his cloak at Þingvellir. The behaviour of Finnbogi and Þorgrímr was very similar to Þorgeir's behaviour. They lay down and covered themselves with a cloak. The wording of these accounts is also similar to the account of Þorgeir—they cover themselves with a cloak, throw a cloak over themselves, cover their heads with it or wrap it round their heads. The pur-

[84] I have acertained this by a study of *Orðabók Árnasafns* in Copenhagen.
[85] Sigfússon in KL VI 1961, 259.
[86] ÍF XIV, 326.
[87] ÍF XIV, 329.

pose of Finnbogi is obscure, but the purpose of Þorgrím's conduct is described in the account of him. He sent his mind to explore what was going on nearby so as to be able to plan his actions. The author gives a vivid description of the art of looking further than eyes can see.

Ari's account says nothing of Þorgeir's actions under the cloak. Conclusions as to what he was doing while he lay there have to be drawn on the basis of his behaviour. The parallels that I have collected above show that all over the North of Europe people lay down in a similar fashion to Þorgeir and explain why they did so. It emerges that they did so in particular to undergo metamorphosis or to send their minds in some way out of the body to investigate what could not be learnt by other methods. The examples show that people woke up much wiser than they lay down and sometimes those who lay down thus looked far into the future.

On the basis of the examples given above it is straightforward to explain Þorgeir's conduct by assuming that he lay under the cloak to investigate matters which he could not otherwise learn about. The description of his stay there suggests that he acted in a similar manner to Þorgrímr Dýrason, but as Þorgeir's stay under the cloak was much longer than Þorgrím's it indicates that Þorgeir went much further in his investigation. For it was not of much use to explore just beyond Þingvellir if he was to solve the task he had been given. He must have needed to contact those spirits or other representatives of the supernatural in which his co-religionists trusted and believed, if he wanted to contribute something convincing. All the evidence tends to show that his effort was directed to this end; that under his cloak he practised some form of necromancy[88] and therefore it was not merely his thoughts that he presented to the assembly at the Lǫgberg on the following day. He appeared then not as a thinker but as an oracle.

Résumé

Scholars have not tryed to refute Ari's account of Þorgeir's long sojourn under his cloak. They have instead tried to explain its purpose. Maurer holds that Þorgeir was pondering over the substance of the laws that he was to promulgate, while Björn M. Ólsen and others conclude that Þorgeir first made a deal with Síðu-Hallr about the substance of the law, and then lay down under his cloak to prepare the promulgation speech. As a result the importance of the speech has been over emphasised.

There is no mention in *Íslendingabók* of Þorgeir having come to an agreement with Síðu-Hallr about the provision of the new laws and there is no parallel in old or new sources that somebody deliberated for so long or in

[88] Buchholz 1968, 50 has arrived at the same conclusion, i.e. that Þorgeir practised some form of necromancy under his cloak, but he does not argue this in detail.

such a fashion. We must therefore seek other explanations of Þorgeir's action. We first try to find examples in old sources of people shutting themselves away like Þorgeir and the reason why they did so.

In old Icelandic sources we find examples of people mumbling into their cloaks and seeing what was hidden from others. Poets bent their heads into their cloaks for inspiration. People lay down, either covered with clothes or locked in, when they resorted to sorcery or underwent metamorphosis while the body rested as if asleep or dead.

Lappish and North Norwegian sources tell of similar metamorphosis by Lapps for the purpose of gaining information from distant places. Both older and younger scholars have shown the connection between these accounts and the old Icelandic sources. Parallels can also be found in Ireland where poets and prophets lay down isolated or sheltered to practise their art. A 19th-century Icelandic source describes a similar wrapping of a person who required news.

Two of the younger Icelandic sagas tell of men who lay down to sleep and covered themselves with their cloaks in much the same way as Þorgeir did. The reason is not clear in one instance but in the other he did so to send his mind on an inspection tour as he lay thus. Of the instances mentioned these two are most similar to that of Þorgeir, but most of the rest also seem akin to his behaviour.

The conclusion of this comparison is that Þorgeir did not stay under the cloak to think but to carry out an ancient soothsaying ritual, the outcome of which he proclaimed at the Lǫgberg the following day. All those present were well aware of this.

XIV. The Law-rock speech and the heathen reaction

1. What did Þorgeir's audience expect?

One of the strangest aspects of the acceptance of Christianity is the reaction of the pagans at the Althing to Þorgeir's speech. Owing to Þorgeir's persuasion they agree, apparently to a man, to reject their old faith and accept Christianity. The same men had nonetheless a year or two earlier passed a law at the General Assembly which branded Christianity as "kin-shame" or an outrage to the family (see above Ch. VI.10), and two days before they accepted Christianity they had been armed to the teeth and prepared to thwart the advance of Christianity by force of arms (see above Ch. VIII.1).

Íslendingabók says: "And now this seems to me the best counsel," he said, "that we do not let those prevail who are most eager to go against each other, but let us so mediate the matter between the two sides that each may win part of his case, and let us all have one law and one religion. For this will turn out to be true, that if we rend asunder the laws we shall also rend the peace." (See above Ch. VII.1.)

By the time Þorgeir had finished his speech he had got both parties to agree to the laws he decided to promulgate. It is difficult for us to tell whether the course of events was exactly as Ari describes it or not, but we must focus on his description for we have no other. We have to try to understand first what Þorgeir meant when he advises everyone to have the same religion and the same laws. And second what the audience expected when they agreed to accept the laws that he would proclaim.

Þorgeir's words, "let us all have one law and one religion", seems to be most naturally related to Síðu-Hall's request that Þorgeir should proclaim laws for the Christians. But as I have argued above (Ch. XI.4), their agreement most probably only concerned special laws for the Christians. From Ari's account we could then interpret Þorgeir's words as a rebuttal to Síðu-Hall's request.

If we assume that Ari follows the course of events minutely, as he could best be trusted to, we may conclude that when Þorgeir's audience heard his words about having the same religion they understood him to refer to heathendom. The Christians, led as they were by Síðu-Hallr, might well modify their demands for the sake of peace, the importance of which Þorgeir also emphasised in his speech. Þorgeir's words, "that each may win part of his case", would appear to the Christians to mean privileges more

than they had enjoyed so far, and on that basis they could agree to Þorgeir's request that they should accept and uphold the laws that he proclaimed. It therefore appears to me that in Ari's account everything points to Þorgeir's audience, pagan and Christians alike, believing that his speech meant that his decision would favour the heathen religion. That belief could well have been the reason why people were so apparently of one mind in agreeing to uphold the laws that Þorgeir would proclaim.

If this interpretation of Ari's words is correct, one can imagine what a shock Þorgeir's decision was to the heathens. They had agreed to uphold the laws that he proclaimed but in the firm belief that there would be no major departure from the heathen laws then in force. According to this interpretation of Ari's words, the problem why the heathens swallowed Þorgeir's decision becomes more acute than ever. They did not have to accept his decision because they were in all likelihood much more numerous at the General Assembly than the Christians (see Ch. VI.13 and VIII.3) and they were quite capable of making the law-speaker suffer for having betrayed them. But they did not do so, though in all likelihood Þorgeir's decision must have come as a complete surprise to them and they must have found it a very difficult decision to abide by. Then why did they accept it?

2. "Let us so mediate the matter"

Þorgeir's words, "that we do not let those prevail who are most eager to go against each other, but let us so mediate the matter between the two sides that each may win part of his case", indicates that both sides harboured extremists who were eager for a show-down, but also people who preferred a peaceful solution. It is difficult to estimate the proportional strength of each but scholars have attempted this nevertheless. Thus Konrad Maurer states:

"Zwischen den beiden sich schroff gegenüberstehenden Partheien der glaubenseifrigen Anhänger der alten und der neuen Religion stand ein dritte Parthei in der Mitte, welche äusserlich zwar dem alten Glauben zugethan war, der aber Staat und Rechtsordnung über die Religion ging"[1] (In between the fierce enemies of the fanatical adherents of the old and new religion there was a third party in the middle. On the surface they were faithful to the old religion but they attached more importance to state and legal order than religion.)

Konrad Maurer has the following to say about the size and strength of this party:

"Wie stark aber nach Zahl und Bedeutung jene Mittelparthei war, als

[1] Maurer I 1855, 439.

deren Meinungsausdruck Thorgeirs Vorschläge erscheinen, zeigt sich am Entschiedensten darin, dass dieselben wirklich durchdrangen."[2] (The size and strength of this centre party at the time when Þorgeir made his proposal can best be seen from the fact that his proposal was actually accepted.)

Here Maurer contends that to a great number of people the constitution and the unity of the state was a more important issue than that of religion. He mentions two men in particular as belonging to this centre party, one of them being Þorgeir the Lawspeaker himself who, Maurer believes, was more concerned with the unity of the state than religion: "Mit dürren Worten weist dieser auf die Nothwendigkeit hin, vor Allem den Staat zu retten: die Religionsfrage erscheint ihm als eine untergeordnete, erst in zweiter Linie stehende;"[3] (In plain words he points out the need above all to save the state. The religious question appears to him to be of less moment, to be no more than secondary.)

Maurer's theory that the pagans at the Assembly were more concerned with politics than religion and therefore accepted the decision of Þorgeir the Lawspeaker has been favoured by other scholars.[4] It may be said that this has been the prevailing interpretation among the scholars who have dealt with this subject[5] even when some of them have uttered criticism of some aspects of it. Thus Ljungberg has pointed out that "Maurer's theory of religious indifference at this 'political act' does not explain exactly why the Icelanders, who in the 980s and 990s engaged almost fanatically in the religious disputes and towards 1000 were a people with strong religious interest, appeared suddenly at the decisive moment to have lost all interest in religious question and relapsed into striking indifference."[6]

This criticism by Ljungberg must be considered justified. But Maurer's reasoning is weak elsewhere. For example, his theory that Þorgeir the Lawspeaker made a political decision is not borne out by *Íslendingabók*. Ari describes Þorgeir's actions in considerable detail during the crucial period at the Assembly. A politician would in all probability have conferred with his supporters before taking any action and tried to gain support for his decision as is usual in the camps of politicians. According to *Íslendingabók* Þorgeir's behaviour was completely different. There is no mention of his having discussed the matter with anybody but Síðu-Hallr as related above (Ch. XI.3). And how did Þorgeir manage to get the other heathens to accept his conclusion without so much as discussing the matter with them?

[2] Maurer I 1855, 440.
[3] Maurer I 1855, 439.
[4] Ólsen 1900, 65 ff.; 96 ff. Helgason 1925, 31. Jóhannesson 1956, 166. Gehl 1937, 143.
[5] See nevertheless above Introduction and notes 3 and 4.
[6] Ljungberg 1938, 156.

On the other hand Maurer is right in assuming the existence of a considerable number of people wanting a peaceful solution, whether we call them a centre party or not. These people trusted Þorgeir above all others and for some reason accepted his decision without a murmur. We shall now try to discover the reason for their consent.

3. The apostle Willibrord on Helgoland

To answer the question why the heathens accepted Þorgeir's decision one has to take a look at the world of ideas prevailing in heathen Nordic countries. The sources are not rich but there are a few accounts which show what people were most likely to take note of and what taught people a lesson. I shall give a brief survey of a few examples.

Willibrord, the apostle of the Frisians and the first bishop of Utrecht, was very active against heathens round the year 700. On Helgoland, the island off the border of Denmark and Frisia, people worshipped the God Fosite. There was a sacred fountain there and no-one was to utter a sound while drawing water from it. Sacred animals grazed on the island and no-one was to touch them. Now Willibrord turned up in this island and he did not hesitate to break the heathen taboos. He baptized three persons in the holy fountain and slaughtered the animals when he wanted to. To the surprise of the heathens no harm came to Willibrord. They informed King Rabbod who turned blue with anger and wanted to revenge this sacrilege. For three days and three times a day he consulted the gods by throwing dice, but Willibrord's lot was never drawn; one of his fellowers was less fortunate and he suffered a martyr's death straight away.[7]

What is noteworthy here is the procedure of the islanders and their king. They send him a report about the sacrileges committed, he is terribly angry and wants revenge, but he does not lift a finger against the wrongdoer without asking the gods first by throwing dice. And when this does not point to Willibrord, the islanders do not consider it permissible to harm him, but one of his followers whom the gods point at is arrested and executed. In this we see a limitless submission to the irrational and an unconditional obedience to the will of the gods arrived at by means of proper old-established procedures.

4. Ansgar and the pagan gods in Sweden

When Ansgar the apostle of Scandinavia came to Sweden to establish Christianity a second time, he held a banquet for the king, gave him

[7] Vita Willibrordi, kap. 10.

presents and asked him if he would support his cause. The king replied that he was ready to support him, but then the account continues in this way: "*Antea tamen hic", inquit, "fuerunt clerici, qui populari hinc seditione, non regio iussu, eiecti sunt. Qua propter et ego hanc legationem vestram confirmare nec possum nec audeo, priusquam sortibus deos nostros consulam et populi quoque super hoc voluntatem interrogem. Sit missus tuus in placito mecum proximo, et ego pro te loquar populo. Et, si quidem diis fautoribus illi tuae consenserint voluntati, quod quaesisti prosberabitur. Sin autem, et hoc tibi notum faciam*".[8] ("There were here", the king said, "earlier priests who were expelled in a public riot, not by royal ordinance. Therefore I neither can nor dare give a positive answer to your request before I have consulted our gods by casting lots and asked the public what their wish is in the matter. Have your messenger accompany me to the assembly, then I shall speak on your behalf to the people. But if with a favorable reply from the gods they agree to your request then you will be successful. If not I shall let you know.") Now time passed till the next assembly. When people had gathered there, the king spoke to the nobles about Ansgar's errand. Then it says: *Qui sortibus quaerendum statuerunt, quae super hoc deorum esset voluntas. Exeuntes igitur more ipsorum in campum, miserunt sortes; ceciditque sors, quod dei voluntate christiana religio ibi fundaretur.*[9] (They decided to find out by casting lots what the will of the gods was in this matter. They therefore went out onto a field, as their custom was, and cast lots and it turned out to be the will of God that Christianity should be established there.)

The biographies of Willibrord and Ansgar were written shortly after the events which they relate occurred.[10] They must be considered good sources, especially on matters which do not offer particular praise of the saintly heroes, though of course these stories were partly written to glorify the "apostles" concerned. In the accounts of Willibrord it is quite clear that it is in no way due to him that he escapes alive from the island of Fosite. On the contrary the gods of the inhabitants apparently did not want him killed, paradoxical though it may seem. Nor is it due to Ansgar's words or actions that it is agreed to allow Christianity into Sweden. The heathen gods decide the issue. They are the ones asked even though Rimbert interprets their answer as God's will. In both these examples it is evidently the oracle that is decisive. It is the oracle which the people obey and abide by. In the account of Ansgar however we are told the people continued to argue against allowing Christianity even after the oracle and were not fully persuaded until an

[8] Vita Anskarii 1884, 57.
[9] Vita Anskarii 1884, 58.
[10] Ahnlund in Rimbert 1965, 7. Levison 1920, 8.

old man discussed the matter and among other things pointed out the usefulness of having one more god to turn to when others were found lacking in power.[11] But there is no doubt that it was the oracle which was mainly responsible for the decision of the Swedes at that assembly.

5. King Óláfr Haraldsson and Dala-Guðbrandr

In the history of the Christian mission in Norway there are accounts similar to the ones above. Snorri gives an account of the baptism of Dala-Guðbrandr, when King Óláfr Haraldsson did great wonders which led Guðbrandr and all his men to accept Christianity. When the statue of Thór had been smashed and King Óláfr gave them a choice between battle and Christianity it says: *Þá stóð Guðbrandr upp ok mælti: skaða mikinn hǫfum vér farit um guð várt; ok þó með því, at hann mátti oss ekki við hjálpa, þá viljum vér nú trúa á þann guð, sem þú trúir" – ok tóku þá allir við kristni.*[12] ("We have suffered great damage in our god, but seeing that he could not aid us we are prepared to trust in the god you trust in"—whereupon they all accepted Christianity.)

Over two hundred years elapsed from the time these events are supposed to have taken place till the account of it was written, so it is not to be counted reliable. But it is quite possible that the events described correspond in some aspects to reality. Of course what matters most is the fact that King Óláfr threatened Guðbrandr with force but the words that Snorri attributes to Guðbrandr—they turn from Thór when they found him lacking in strength—are worthy of note. In the history of religion it is often mentioned that people turn away from their gods when the gods show they are not worthy of the trust put in them and can not defend their worshippers in a moment of crisis.[13]

6. An important analogue to Ari's account

The two last examples are of assemblies where heathens either decide to allow Christian missionaries to work in the country or accept Christianity to a man. Neither of these examples is a complete parallel with the events of Þingvellir. I feel nevertheless that the assembly in Sweden is an important analogue to what happened at the Althing. A heathen majority is persuaded that it is right to permit Christianity to enter the country. The paradox is that it is the heathen gods themselves who are asked and who give the reply;

[11] Vita Anskarii 1884, 58.
[12] *Heimskringla* 1911, 286.
[13] 1. Kon. 18, 21–46.

it is the heathen gods themselves, or some other supernatural powers, that give an answer to the question directed to them through sacrifice, lot-casting or in some other way. In the chapter above on fate it was mentioned that one of the main functions of sacrifice was to provide oracles, when enquiry about the future was made (Ch. IV.3). It is also shown there (Ch. IV.1) how useless it was believed to be for human beings to oppose what was decided upon and predestined. But not only human beings were dependent upon fate in this way, the gods were so too (Ch. IV.2). Therefore it was theoretically quite possible, to the heathen mind, for an oracle to tell them to reject their present gods and believe in a new god. In this oracle the heathens would have recognized the destiny of the gods and their own which they had to obey. If it is correct, as has been argued above (Ch. XIII.16), that Þorgeir sought an oracle under the cloak, it is easier to understand why the heathens did not oppose his decision but accepted it.

7. What Ari knew about Þorgeir's behaviour

But what did Ari know about Þorgeir's actions? Could he have known the truth about Þorgeir's oracle without mentioning it specifically in his book? To answer these questions one has to realize what conditions were like when *Íslendingabók* was written. It starts with these words: "I wrote *Íslendingabók* first for our bishops Þorlákr and Ketill and showed it to them and the priest Sæmundr" (above Ch. V.1 and note 2). A book which is written under the auspices of the two Icelandic bishops and read over by the most learned of Ari's contemporaries is not likely to propagate much paganism.[14] It could not further the cause of the church in Iceland if it was said that the conversion of the country was due to a heathen goði receiving the message from his gods that the inhabitants should accept Christianity.

Here we may ask why Ari and the bishops were so reluctant to admit that fate decided Þorgeir's actions, which they could have interpreted as God's will or *dei voluntate* in the same way as Rimbert (see above Ch. XIV.4). The reason why I think Ari avoids speaking plainly about Þorgeir's actions is that similar behaviour was one of the superstitious elements which the church was trying to uproot in his day. The account of Þorgrímr Dýrason (Ch. XIII.14 above) shows that this behaviour was preserved by the Icelanders and the example from *Þjóðsögur Jóns Árnasonar* (above Ch. XIII.13) points to similar behaviour to that of Þorgeir's having early become part of the Icelandic stock of superstition. This act could therefore not be referred to as lawful pagan procedure, which it was possible to perform with official pagan rites such as sacrifice and lot-casting. This act was

[14] See Laxness 1973, 14.

in all probability taboo in Ari's time. On the other hand, it seems to me that everything indicates that Ari knew all about Þorgeir's behaviour as it has been explained here, for in this interpretation of Þorgeir's action I have not departed at all from Ari's words in *Íslendingabók*. The space devoted to the account of Þorgeir's stay under the cloak in this small book shows that Ari must have considered this all-important.

Ari's sources about the acceptance of Christianity are so varied (see above Ch. V.1), and he gives such a good account of them that it is natural to assume that he understood what it was that proved decisive. In addition, the evidence may suggest that Ari himself did not draw a sharp distinction between the normal and the supernatural. His account in *Íslendingabók* of the dream of Þorsteinn surtr shows that prophecy and soothsaying did not appear absurd to him.[15] In this he was doubtless the product of his age, because one should probably assume that in the 12th and 13th centuries people did not distinguish sharply between men with the ability to see the true relationship between wordly things and men with a special gift to perceive the unfathomable. Both could be useful when faced with everyday tasks.

My conclusion therefore is that Ari knew the true significance of Þorgeir's behaviour and chose his words in *Íslendingabók* accordingly.

8. Theodoricus monachus and the priest Þormóðr

The account of Ari the Wise in *Íslendingabók* of the acceptance of Christianity is written with the assurance of a person who knows exactly how to choose his words and uses neither too many nor too few. But those who wrote later about this event evidently found it difficult to fit Ari's account into their understanding of reality. This goes to support the conclusion that Ari knew more about the true nature of the events at Þingvellir than they, that he knew more than he actually says.

Theodoricus monachus considers that the preaching of the priest Þormóðr was decisive at Þingvellir: *Hujus presbyteri prædicatonem tam efficax gratia sancti spiritus comitata est, ut totam illam barbariem in brevi ad Christum converteret.*[16] (But the Holy Spirit endowed this priest's preaching with such efficacious grace that he converted all the heathens to Christianity in a short time.) Theodoricus does not doubt at all that a miracle converted the Icelanders to Christianity. He does not mention Þorgeir's speech but relates the miracle to Þormóð's preaching. Now it is likely as mentioned above (Ch. V.2) that Theodoricus had good sources about the acceptance of Christianity in Iceland. Theodoricus must have had every op-

[15] ÍF I, 9 f.
[16] Storm 1880, 21.

portunity to know Ari's account of the acceptance of Christianity, something doubtless known to every educated Icelander in the second half of the 12th century.

It has been argued above (Ch. VI.2) that Theodoricus was correct in saying that Thangbrandr baptized Þorgils from Ölfus. If this is so, it adds credibility to other aspects of Theodoricus's account of the acceptance of Christianity in Iceland. Now it is impossible that an Icelander had told Theodoricus that Þormóð's preaching had been decisive at the Althing, but it is quite understandable that Theodoricus should find it difficult to understand that the grace of the Holy Ghost could accompany the speech of the pagan goði to such an extent that all the pagan multitude should be converted to Christianity. This in fact is such a paradox that an orthodox 12th-century monk could hardly be expected to accept it. The most feasible conclusion is that the report went astray in Theodoricus's treatment because of his inability to cast Þorgeir in the role of the missionary. This is more likely to be an unwitting misrepresentation than a deliberate distortion of the truth.

9. A miracle occurred when Þorgeir finished his speech

The author of *Ól.Tr.m.* favours a very similar explanation to that of Theodoricus monachus. This is probably due to direct influence (see above Ch. V.3–5; VIII.1) where the direct influence of Theodoricus's work on *Ól.Tr.m.* is discussed. *Ól.Tr.m.* says this on the pagan acceptance of Þorgeir's jurisdiction: *En er Þorgeir gerði enda á sinni ræðu, þá gaf guðligr ǫrleikr svá mikla miskunnar framkvæmd hans málsnilldar, at allir þingmenn, svá kristnir sem heiðnir, játuðu þegar með einu samþykki, svá at engi mælti í móti, at hafa ok halda þau lǫg í alla staði, sem hann vildi fram segja.*[17] (But when Þorgeir had finished his speech then merciful divine munificence gave his eloquence such a merciful success that all the assembly men, heathens and Christians alike, immediately agreed in unision and with no one opposing to have and keept the laws in every respect which he wanted to proclaim.)

Here the author of these words in *Ól.Tr.m.* implies that a miracle occurred at Þingvellir about the time Þorgeir finished his speech. To my mind there is no indication that the author of these words is wittingly trying to deceive; but on the basis of his knowledge it was impossible for him to explain what happened except as a miracle. So Theodoricus's explanation of the merciful divine munificence was useful even when the author did not copy it literally, which is understandable, seeing the author of these words

[17] *Ól.Tr.m.* 2 1961, 196.

in *Ól.Tr.m.* had to allow the miracle occur after the speech of Þorgeir, a pagan goði.

10. Fill in the gaps by guesswork

These examples show that in the second half of the 12th century and in the 13th century churchmen wanted to interpret the acceptance of Christianity at the Althing as a miracle; not a miracle realized on external signs and great prodigies, for these were not present, but a miracle achieved by the grace of the Holy Ghost. The reason why this explanation was put forward must be that people could in no other way explain the course of events as the most reliable source, *Íslendingabók*, represented them to have been.

This attempted explanation by learned men in the 12th and 13th centuries has a similar origin to that of the explanation put forward by Konrad Maurer in the 19th century and which has since been generally accepted (see above Ch. XIV.1), i.e. that a deliberate political plan was decisive for the result at the Althing. What they have in common is that they fill in the gaps by guesswork and assume certain sentiments and thoughts concerning the final decision that have no firm support in *Íslendingabók* or other sources. But in these explanations one of the main items in Ari's account is left largely unaccounted for, i.e. Þorgeir's stay under the cloak.

11. An old and well-known method

In this book on the other hand it has been my main concern to throw light on Þorgeir's stay under the cloak and to attempt to relate his action to similar events in heathendom. It seems to me that what has emerged from this comparison is that Þorgeir most probably resorted to an old and well-known method to contact the powers which, according to the understanding of his contemporaries, knew better than mortals how to respond to such a problem. At the Lǫgberg he delivered the message he had received and people reacted as they usually did and made no attempts to oppose fate. Various external factors may have played their part, e.g. the fact that four sons of Icelandic chieftains were held hostage by King Óláfr, and people may also have seen other positive grounds for keeping the king's friendship.

12. How Þorgeir got his jurisdiction

Scholars have pondered whence Þorgeir got his jurisdiction to decide upon such radical changes for the pagans. As traced above (Ch. XIII.4) Jóhannesson has correctly stressed the fact that Þorgeir must have had to persuade both pagans and Christians to accept his jurisdiction. But

Jóhannesson does not attempt to show how Þorgeir obtained this from the heatens,[18] for *Íslendingabók* and other sources are silent in this respect. Nevertheless it is obvious that Þorgeir had to have his jurisdiction accepted.

Given the restricted authority of the lawspeaker[19] it is difficult to understand Ari's silence on where Þorgeir obtained the authority to adjucate the matter. As shown above Ari is silent on other aspects as well. He does not reveal why Þorgeir lay down under his cloak at Þingvellir nor why he lay there so long. In this work I have attempted to explain this action and the reason for Ari's silence.

The course of events at the General Assembly is described in such detail in Íslendingabók that it appears impossible for Þorgeir to have conferred with his supporters to obtain their consent. So I am of the opinion that his authority must have been related to his stay under the cloak. The specific action which he carried out and is shown by his long stay under the cloak gave him the necessary jurisdiction. This action was then undertaken on behalf of all the heathens at the Althing. He required no other authority to promulgate what he found out under the cloak. If this is correct, it becomes understandable why the pagans accepted Þorgeir's decision without question.

Résumé

The pagan reaction to Þorgeir's decision is somewhat unexpected, for there is much to suggest that when they promised to abide by his decision they were thinking it would favour the pagan faith.

Scholars have been of the opinion that politics and the unity of the state were a more important issue to the pagans than their faith. Thus Þorgeir's decision was of a political nature and accepted as such. The counter-evidence is the fact that *Íslendingabók* does not show Þorgeir proceeding as politicians usually do. I therefore reject the opinion that political consideration alone decided the issue, though it must be admitted that a great number of people at the General Assembly must have desired a peaceful solution. This group trusted Þorgeir, but why did they accept his decision without a murmur?

Examples from Helgoland and Sweden show that pagans of old were in the habit of consulting their gods when faced with novel problems. In Sweden the pagans conferred and cast lots to consult their gods before permitting Christianity. The oracle seems to have been decisive. If Þorgeir sought an oracle under his cloak as I have argued above (Ch. XIII.16), it is easier to understand why the assembled pagans accepted his decision.

[18] About the consent of the Christians to Þorgeir's jurisdiction see above Ch. XI.3 ff.
[19] *Grágás* I, 217.

Ari may have been well aware of the nature of Þorgeir's action, as I have assumed, and I have nowhere departed from his written account in my explanation. Deference to the bishops and contemporary superstition may have obliged him to choose his words in the way he did.

Some of the 12th- and 13th-century writers on the Conversion of Iceland thought the issue was decided by a miracle due to God's merciful grace. This was the only way they could make Ari's account of events tally with the reality they understood. 19th- and 20th-century historians who have given political reasons for the Conversion have similarly resorted to guesswork to arrive at their conclusions but they have omitted to give any full explanation of Þorgeir's stay under the cloak.

In this work I have concentrated on explaining Þorgeir's stay under his cloak. My conclusion is that he was carrying out a well-known and ancient action which people all over the northern countries resorted to when faced with supernatural problems. This action gave Þorgeir the authority to adjucate in this dispute between the pagans and Christians and it explains why people accepted his decision.

Summary

1.
I–IV. The religion of the settlers. Paganism in Iceland. Fate.

Sources relating to the settlers' religion and paganism in Iceland consist of archeological remains, ancient poetry, *Landnámabók* and the *Íslendingasögur* besides the evidence derived from personal and topographical names. Archeological remains are scanty from the earliest period (c. 870–1000), mainly consisting of burial places and objects connected with these. Still, it should be born in mind that there is much work untouched in the field of archeological research in Iceland. Some of the oldest poems are judged to be from before the year 1000 and so to constitute together with archeological remains contemporary evidence from the pagan period. *Landnámabók* is originally from about 1100 or early 12th century, but it has been preserved in versions from the 13th and 14th centuries and in these tendency to exaggerate the role of the Christian settlers may be detected. The *Íslendingasögur* are at best of limited value as sources of information on paganism, even though it is not impossible that some of the oral tradition, which can be detected in the sagas, contains a kernel of historical fact.

Landnámabók and the *Íslendingasögur* are reticent on the religious activity of the settlers. There are however glimpses of sacrifices in Norway prior to departure for Iceland similar to the communal sacrificial feasts known from contemporary sources outside Scandinavia describing Nordic pagan rites. *Landnámabók* has an account of sacrifice by settlers on making land in Iceland. The earliest version of this gives a plausible description of a religious ceremony, whereas in later versions this has been turned into a story of witchcraft and magic.

It is difficult to assess the source-value of some accounts which tell of settlers throwing their high-seat-pillars overboard and building their farms where they were washed ashore. Dag Strömbäck has shown that similar activity has ancient roots in Nordic paganism, while accounts of other objects, a chest and an iron bell, which are supposed to have served a similar purpose, and parallel account of a Christian and his church timber make the account of the high-seat pillars less reliable. It is dangerous to interpret them literally. Accounts of settlers who circled territory with fire, thus hallowing themselves the land, describes an activity which also appears to be rooted in ancient Nordic religion. Sometimes this is mentioned in direct connection with heathen worship; pieces of land are hallowed to temples,

and zealous worshippers are said to have hallowed big areas to themselves. This might point to a link between such activity and pagan custom, even though this cannot be asserted with complete confidence.

Both *Landnámabók* and *Íslendingasögur* reveal the fact that they were written by Christians in a country which had practised Christianity for centuries. For this reason several of their accounts of pagan behaviour have superstitious flavour.

Landnámabók mentions some settlers specifically as Christians. Yet, accordning to *Landnámabók* and other written sources, the great majority of the settlers were pagan. This conclusion receives support from the study of grave finds in Iceland from the 10th century.

The old poetry, various written sources and place-names indicate that Thór was most worshipped of the pagan gods in Iceland. There are also reliable sources on the worship of Freyr in the 10 century, but it is more doubtful how far Óðinn was worshipped. There is no direct evidence of a cult of Óðinn in Iceland, while in the poems of ancient poets he has many names. He appears to have been much venerated by the poets, by some even after they were converted to Christianity.

Some pagan religious verse has been preserved in Iceland. It bears witness to a strong and sincere pagan faith. In some of these poems Thór is addressed in the second person, and the deeds he is supposed to have done are described. During the conflicts at the time of the missionary activity Thór was invoked to assist his followers. Poems that are considered contemporary and unadulterated describe his valiant defence of his supporters. According to the pagan poets Christ was of little use to the missionaries since he was unable to protect them and their possessions against the wrath of Thór and other pagan gods.

It is not certain that temples were ever erected in Iceland in pagan times in spite of the evidence supplied by names of farms and other places, and in spite of the words of Ari the Wise. Nothing can be confidently asserted until more light has been shed upon the subject.

Fatalism appears to have been deep-rooted in the world of ideas that gave birth to the Icelandic sources. The belief in fate is evident in the works of the 13th century, the *Íslendingasögur* and *Sturlunga saga*, but it cannot be decided whether this was due to the influence of contemporary attitudes or to an ancient tradition reflecting past ideology, or to both. Fatalism is often evident in the verse sources, some of which definitely date from pagan times, some even from as early as the 9th century. For the history of religion it is of importance that in these poems the pagan gods were regarded as at the mercy of fate, whereas Christ was superior to fate. This advantage of his was bound to be of significance as the conflict grew between the two religions.

2.

V–VII. Sources on the Acceptance of Christianity in Iceland. Missionary Activity.

The chief source on the acceptance of Christianity in Iceland is *Íslendingabók* written by Ari the Wise between 1122 and 1133. Besides other possible sources Ari based his account on the evidence supplied by several informants whom he mentions by name. Many of these were born before the middle of the 11th century, and the oldest of them just before the year 1000. Some of these informants were closely related to the chief figures connected with the Conversion. The bishops of Skálholt and Hólar urged Ari to undertake his task and they and Sæmundr the Wise read it through. Sæmundr was the most erudite historian in Iceland. It is possible that this supervision and the close links of the informants with the events may have coloured Ari's work to some extent, but in the main he seems to have been anxious to provide as trustworthy information as possible. *Íslendingabók* is therefore a unique source on the Conversion of the country and must form the basis of all research into the matter. Only when each and every aspect of *Íslendingabók* has been explained can we consider other works on the Conversion.

Other sources on the Conversion base their accounts to greater or less extent on *Íslendingabók*. The second oldest source is *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* by Theodoricus monachus written in Norway about 1180. About 1190 Oddr Snorrason, monk in the monastery of Þingeyri, wrote a book in Latin about King Óláfr Tryggvason where an account is found of the events leading to the Conversion. This work is only preserved in fragments. Odd's work lacks a critical historical attitude; the main emphasis is laid on extolling the missionary king, Óláfr Tryggvason and his role, often to the detriment of credibility. There is a fundamental difference between this work and that of Ari's as far as method and scientific attitude to the subject matter are concerned.

Other younger works on the Conversion all suffer from the same lack of critical attitude to religious legends as Odd's book. These consist of *Kristni saga*, perhaps compiled by Sturla Þórðarson about 1250; *Njáls saga's* "Conversion *þáttr*", in its present version from about 1280; and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* from the beginning of the 14th century. These three sources are thought to be based on a lost work about King Óláfr Tryggvason, written in Latin by Gunnlaugr Leifsson about the year 1200, but translated into Icelandic fairly soon afterwards. Gunnlaug's book is thought to have been an uncritical history written in the cause of the church and based to some extent on Odd's work. The most valuable source material in *Kristni saga, Njáls saga's* "Conversion *þáttr*" and *Ól.Tr.m.* are verses from the missionary period—they are almost identical in the three works and are apparently not distorted from their original form.

In *Íslendingabók* Ari the Wise describes how Óláfr Tryggvason sent the missionary Thangbrandr to Iceland where he baptised three influential chieftains in addition to many other people. But he also states that there were more who turned against Thangbrand's mission and this caused him to return to Norway after one or two years' sojourn in Iceland, having killed two or three people who had lampooned him. On his return to Norway, a year before the Conversion took place, he is said to have told King Óláfr that there was no hope that Icelanders would receive the faith as yet.

Younger sources give more information on Thangbrand's mission, they enumerate more chieftains baptised by him and three of them contain the lampooning verses referred to above. These give a clear picture of the violent spiritual and material conflict which Iceland witnessed in the years leading to the Conversion between the missionaries and the pagan poets who were the most dedicated pagan spokesmen and defended the last bastion of paganism with arms and ridicule.

Ari the Wise mentions that Bishop Friðrik came to Iceland during pagan times and younger sources give an account of the mission of Friðrik and Þorvaldr viðfǫrli, mentioning people who were converted by them. The younger sources also mention the missionary Stefnir Þorgilsson, who is said to have been sent to Iceland c. 996 by Óláfr Tryggvason. It is not told what success Stefnir had but owing to his conduct a law was passed that the relatives of Christians should prosecute them for blasphemy. The younger sources contain the lampoon about Bishop Friðrik and Þorvaldr which gave cause to the killings and verses about the adversity Þorvaldr viðfǫrli and Stefnir suffered at the hands of the pagans and their gods.

The accounts of Christian missions to Iceland resemble those of missionary activities elsewhere in Northern Europe. This could be explained by assuming that Icelandic authors had access to such accounts when they wrote theirs. But a special Icelandic phenomenon in this conflict is the lampooning, which also constitutes the most reliable indication of the conflict which one may thus be certain ensued from the mission.

The younger sources confirm the account of missionary activity found in *Íslendingabók*. They also show that the mission of Thangbrandr met with some success in spite of coming to an abrupt end.

Christianity appears to have gained a secure foothold in Iceland at about the end of the missionary period. Opposition against it was nevertheless fierce, especially among the poets. The majority of Icelanders were still heathen as were most of their chieftains.

3.

VII–XII. At the General Assembly. Gizurr, Hjalti, Síðu-Hallr, Þorgeir.

In *Íslendingabók* Ari the Wise gives an account of the course of events leading to the Conversion of Iceland. He describes the journey of Gizurr and Hjalti from Norway, the gathering of Christians at Vellankatla and their ride to Þingvellir which almost resulted in a battle. The following day Gizurr and Hjalti delivered a speech at the Lawrock, whereupon the Christians and pagans declared themselves out of law with each other. The Christians chose Síðu-Hallr to be their law-giver but he aquitted himself by entrusting to Þorgeir the Lawspeaker, who was still pagan, the task of drafting laws for the Christian community. On reaching his booth Þorgeir lay down under a cloak. Thus he lay all that day and the following night without uttering a word. The following day he arose and addressed the Assembly at the Lawrock, stressing the danger of not having joint laws and one faith. He persuaded people in many ways until everybody agreed to keep the laws which he should announce. Then it was declared to be law that all people should be Christian and those who were not baptised should receive baptism. As to the eating of horseflesh and the exposure of children the old laws should remain in force. Men might sacrifice secretly as long as no witnesses could be produced against them.

Several aspects of Ari's account need clarifying and an attempt is made to do so. The first question raised is how a battle was avoided when the Christians rode to Þingvellir. Theodoricus considered it a miracle and *Ól.Tr.m.* offers the same explanation. It has been suggested that news of King Óláfr Tryggvason's hostages arrived at Þingvellir at this critical point, but there is some evidence that this news had come earlier. The Christian party may have been more powerful than had been expected. And there were probably people on both sides who wanted to compromise. The chief reason why a battle was avoided is likely to be connected with the fact that Gizurr and Hjalti were permitted to speak at the Lawrock the following day.

It has not been fully explained what Ari means by Gizurr and Hjalti delivering a message at the Lawrock. A probable suggestion is that they spoke not only of Christianity but had some message from King Óláfr. The curious thing is that Hjalti, an outlaw, should be permitted to speak at the Lawrock.

It is not clear whether the joint renunciation of the community of law was due to religious or political differences, or both. The Christians seem to have felt capable of founding their own state, maybe expecting the support of King Óláfr. It might be an explanation of why the pagans renounced the community of law vis-à-vis the Christians that this was the only way for them to make a mass proscription of the Christians.

Síðu-Hallr played a key role in connection with the Conversion. Besides *Íslendingabók* his name appears in several sources of varying reliability. According to these he appears to have been peaceloving, conciliatory and ready to pay a heavy price to avoid bloodshed. Thus he seems a likely person to work for conciliation at Althing and more likely to moderate his demands than cling to them obstinately. Síðu-Hallr and Þorgeir appear to have been alone in their deal that Þorgeir should pronounce the laws for the Christian community. As Ari does not mention other parties to that agreement, any alternative seems to be ruled out.

Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði was lawspeaker for 17 years and the sources describe him as a highly esteemed and powerful chieftain, a father of many children. A late source describes Þorgeir as farsighted, influential and with a gift of prophecy. The source-value of this report is very limited. Þorgeir's great-uncle was remembered as a prescient sacrificer, Þorsteinn rauðnefr, and Þorgeir's bastard son was Finni the dreamwise, who was famous for his supernatural gifts. Finni's mother was probably a Finn or Lapp.

4.
XIII. Under the Cloak

Not surprisingly scholars have been puzzled by Þorgeir's long sojourn under his cloak at Þingvellir. They have not tried to refute Ari's account of Þorgeir's behaviour but instead tried to explain why he retired in this way and why he stayed so long under the cloak. Konrad Maurer held that Þorgeir was pondering over the substance of the laws that he had agreed to promulgate, while Björn M. Ólsen and others have concluded that Þorgeir first made a deal with Síðu-Hallr about the substance of the laws and then lay down under his cloak to prepare the promulgation speech. As a result the importance of the speech has been overemphasised.

Jón Jóhannesson stresses the need for Þorgeir to gain some right of jurisdiction so that both parties could accept his verdict. He assumes that both sides moderated their demands somewhat, whereupon Þorgeir considered the matter in his booth and then announced his verdict at the Lawrock. Sigurður Nordal suggests that Þorgeir arrived at his decision underneath his cloak by deep meditation and he assumes that Þorgeir lay awake the whole time. His whole manner and appearance as he arose caused his decision and solution to be trusted.

All the above-mentioned scholars assume that Þorgeir lay awake all night under his cloak pondering over his task, the contents of the law or the promulgation speech. There is no parallel in old or new works of people pondering over a problem for as long as this, in similar circumstances and in equal isolation. Ari's account of Þorgeir's soujourn under the cloak is also different from what people would ordinarily have expected, and is

therefore in all probability based on historical fact. This necessitates a search for a new explanation of Þorgeir's actions. The first thing is to find if there are other sources telling of people who isolate themselves from their surroundings in a similar way and what their purpose might have been.

In old Icelandic sources there are descriptions of people mumbling into their cloaks and thus seeing what was hidden from others. And according to old Icelandic sources poets bent their heads into their cloaks when they wanted to compose poetry. They appear to have done this to find inspiration in their isolation. Old Nordic sources contain accounts of people lying down, covering themselves with clothes or locking themselves in, when they resorted to sorcery or underwent metamorphosis. The body meantime rested as if asleep or dead.

Lappish and North Norwegian sources tell of a similar metamorphosis by Lapps for the purpose of gaining information from distant places. Many scholars have shown the similarity between these accounts and the old Icelandic sources. It is further evidence of the link between shamanism and *seiðr* which Dag Strömbäck pointed out in 1935. Parallels can also be found in Ireland where poets and prophets are said to have laid down in isolation from other people to practise their art. This provides an interesting parallel to the Nordic and Icelandic poets and soothsayers who hid their heads in their cloaks for inspiration or to see what was hidden to others. A 19th-century Icelandic source has a similar description of a person who requiring news wraps himself in a hide and lies overnight in a remote spot.

Two of the later Icelandic sagas tell of men who lay down to sleep and covered themselves with their cloaks in much the same way as Ari has Þorgeir do. The reason is not clear in one instance but in the other we are literally told that the man did so to send his mind out of his body on an inspection tour to see what lay in wait for him at the farm nearby. When he awoke he explained that his mind (*hugr*) had been over at the farm.

These last two examples are closest in detail to the description of Þorgeir. Other examples mentioned in this chapter are also to a greater or less extent akin to his and most or all of them show affinity with his behaviour.

The conclusion of this comparison is that Þorgeir did not lie under his cloak to think but in order to carry out an ancient soothsaying ritual and to search into the future. This doubtless affected the message he proclaimed at the Lawrock the following day. We may assume that all those present knew what Þorgeir was about and the purpose of his action.

5.

XIV. Þorgeir's decision and the pagan reaction

The pagan reaction to the decision of Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði has long puzzled scholars. Various things suggest that when Þorgeir announced his verdict his audience were expecting a decision in favour of the pagan faith. If this is true, the pagan reaction is even stranger.

Scholars with Konrad Maurer at their head have long been of the opinion that politics and an anxiety to preserve the unity of the state were the decisive factors at Þingvellir. This was more important to people than their faith. Thus they hold that Þorgeir's decision was of a political nature and accepted as such. The counter-evidence is the fact that *Íslendingabók* does not show Þorgeir proceeding as politicians usually do. We must therefore reject the opinion that political considerations decided the issue, though it must be admitted that a great number of the people at the Assembly desired a peaceful solution. This group trusted Þorgeir, but why did they accept his decision without a murmur?

Nordic sources show pagans in Frisia and in Sweden consulting their gods when facing novel problems that demanded solution. In Sweden the pagans cast lots to consult their gods before admitting Christian missionaries. The oracle seems to have been the decisive factor. If Þorgeir sought an oracle under the cloak as I have argued above, it is easier to understand why the assembled pagans accepted his decision.

Ari's account of the Conversion in *Íslendingabók*, both his description and choice of words, may indicate that he understood Þorgeir's actions in a similar way to what has been argued. There is no need to depart from *Íslendingabók* in explaining Þorgeir's actions or to maintain anything contrary to Ari's account. It is clear however that Ari could not explicitly state why Þorgeir stayed under the cloak if Þorgeir's purpose was what is suggested here, and for two reasons. First, *Íslendingabók* was written under the auspices of the bishops of Iceland, and second, Þorgeir's action was no doubt part of banned superstition at the time the book was written. So Ari had to choose his words carefully and this he seems to have succeded in doing without omitting essential facts.

12th- and 13th-century writers on the Conversion thought it was brought about by a miracle due to God's merciful grace. This was the only way they could make Ari's account of events tally with the reality they understood. A similar solution is sought by those 19th- and 20th-century scholars who have given political reasons for the Conversion. They, too, have departed from Ari's text and tried to find an explanation of what they could not get to tally with their reality outside the text. These scholars have consequently failed to deal with an important aspect of Ari's account—Þorgeir's soujourn under his cloak.

In this work, on the other hand, I have concentrated on explaining

Þorgeir's stay under his cloak. My conclusion is that under the cloak Þorgeir carried out an ancient action well known all over Northern Europe in his days, an action which people often resorted to when faced with pressing or insoluble problems. This action gave Þorgeir the right of jurisdiction he needed to adjudicate in the dispute. If this theory is correct, it also explains why the pagans accepted Þorgeir's decision.

List of abbreviations

ASB = Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek.
FAS = Fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda.
ÍF = Íslenzk fornrit.

ÍF I,1–2 = Íslendingabók. Landnámabók.
Íf II = Egils saga Skallagrímssonar.
ÍF IV = Eyrbyggja saga. Eiríks saga rauða.
IF VI = Gísla saga Súrssonar.
Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings.
ÍF VIII = Vatnsdæla saga. Hallfreðar saga.
Kormáks saga.
ÍF IX = Víga-Glúms saga.
ÍF X = Ljósvetninga saga.
ÍF XI = Vápnfirðinga saga. Hrafnkels saga
Freysgoða.
ÍF XII = Njáls saga.
ÍF XIV = Finnboga saga.
ÍF XXVI = Heimskringla.

KL = Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder.
LP = Lexicon Poeticum.
NK = Nordisk kultur.
NVAOA = Det norske videnskabs-akademi i Oslos avhandlinger.
Odd's Ólafssaga = Snorrason, O.: Saga Ólafs Tryggvasonar.
Ól.Tr.m. = Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta.
Skj. = Jónsson, F.: (ed.) Den norsk-islandske skjaldediktning.
SUGNL = Samfund til Udgivelse af gammel nordisk Litteratur.
Versions of Landnámabók:
H = Hauksbók
M = Melabók
Sk = Skarðsárbók
S = Sturlubók
Þ = Þórðarbók

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